



# JEEVADHARA

## **ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS IN THE CHURCH**

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**Edited by  
Kuncheria Pathil**

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# *jeevadharma*

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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## **Role of the Religious in the Church**

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## Editorial

As the Church must be always reformed, so too religious life, and Vatican II called all the religious institutes for appropriate and timely renewal, taking into consideration today's changing world and the needs and challenges of the time. For any renewal, the first thing we need is to have a correct understanding of the nature and mission of religious life, its origin, evolution in the history of the Church and the problems and challenges the religious face today. This number of *Jeevadhara* tries to have a fresh look at the role and significance of Religious Life and the problems and challenges it faces today.

The opening article by the editor is meant to be a very general one as an introduction to the theme of this Number. It highlights the nature and mission of Consecrated Life in the light of the recent teachings of the Church, especially of Vatican II, and introduces some issues and challenges facing the men and women of the Consecrated Life today. An attempt is made to shed some light on some of the issues, and it points to some direction towards an understanding of solving some of these issues. The second article by Mathew Paikada briefly examines the history of the evolution of religious life in the Church starting with the Desert Fathers till the most modern Secular Institutes. There are mainly three broader categories of religious institutes, *Monastic*, *Apostolic* and *Secular*. He observes that in the name of renewal and adaptation, there is a tendency of Apostolic Orders becoming monastic and contemplative and vice versa. This is dangerous to the identity and mission of each specifically different religious institute.

In the third article, Jacob Parappally, explains the mission of the Church in the context of the paradigm shift made by Vatican II both in

Christology and ecclesiology. A proper and balanced understanding of the roles of the hierarchy and the religious in the fulfilling of the mission of Christ is imperative for the effectiveness of the mission of the Church in the world. The shift of emphasis made by Vatican II both in Christology and Ecclesiology by a servant model and people of God model affects the mission and functioning of all the members of the Church, especially the hierarchy and the religious and their relationship. The author Jacob Parappally highlights the role of both the hierarchy and the religious and their partnership in the common mission of the Church. All misunderstandings and disagreements shall be overcome by frank and fraternal dialogue for the sake of the mission of the Church.

In the fourth article, the author Sunny Thottapally, argues that unless the religious and religious institutes make an uncompromising option for the poor and be ready to live with them and be committed to eradicate poverty, misery and exploitation, radical following of Christ becomes a mockery. He tries to spell out the social and evangelical commitment of the religious and hints at practical points and conclusions. In the last article the author, Varghese Koluthara, highlights from the point of view of the Code of Canons the ecclesial reality of religious institutes, relation of religious with the local Church, mutual relationship of hierarchy and religious and the rightful autonomy of religious institutes and their mission. He emphasizes the mutual relationship of hierarchy and religious and calls for closer collaboration between bishops and religious superiors in the Church for the effective mission of the Church.

There is a widespread tendency in the Church that the hierarchy tries to control the life, charism, activities and mission of the religious on the one hand and on the other the religious function in the Church as a parallel Church without relating to the hierarchy and submitting to their legitimate authority. The source of all charisms and gifts in the Church is the Holy Spirit and both the hierarchy and the religious must submit themselves ultimately to the promptings and movements of the Holy Spirit.

**Kuncheria Pathil**

# Challenges to Consecrated Life Today

**Kuncheria Pathil**

This article is meant to be very general as an introduction to the theme of this Number. It has two parts. Part I highlights certain clarifications and perspectives on the Consecrated Life in the light of the recent teachings of the Church, especially of Vatican II. In Part II, some issues and challenges facing the men and women of the Consecrated Life today are picked up and an attempt is made to shed some light on some of the issues, and points to some direction towards an understanding in solving these issues. The article is mainly for discussion and therefore, it is provisional. The author, the editor of this number, is Kuncheria Pathil cmi, who resides at present at Jeevadhara Centre and currently the Director of its Centre for Socio-Religious Research, recognized by Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

## **I**

### **Consecrated Life: Some Clarifications and New Perspectives**

In recent times it was the Second Vatican Council which mainly by the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree on Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* theologically clarified the concept of Consecrated Life and called for its renewal in all the Religious Orders and Institutes, and outlined the principles/guidelines for the renewal. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II *Vita Consecrata* (1996) further clarified and elaborated the Council's teachings. The Council tried to articulate the essential relationship of consecrated life to the Church and offered some new perspectives and orientations. I shall try to spell out some of these theological clarifications and new perspectives very briefly:

(1) The history of the Church right from the early period witnessed powerful spiritual and prophetic movements led by several holy men and women. They were clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit in response to the needs of the Church and they subsequently founded their own religious communities for their followers. All of them had practically the same motto, to follow Christ freely, intensely and radically and to continue the ministry of Jesus in their own particular historical context and needs. All of them were fascinated by the life and example of Jesus who was chaste, poor and obedient to the Father and by His absolute commitment to the Kingdom of God. The Church always received these religious communities as a gift of God to the Church, and the Council underlined the bounden duty of the Church to preserve, interpret and guide them and to approve the new movements and communities as the Church will never lack the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Today we have thus a wide variety of religious communities, Orders, Congregations and Institutes with different life-styles and orientations.

(2) The Council clarified that religious state of life is not a third state between clerical and lay states. Some members of the clergy as well as the laity are called to this life and it is a permanent state of life.<sup>1</sup> Four main elements run through all the religious orders and institutes, namely, practice of evangelical counsels, prayer, apostolic activities and community life. Intense and radical following of Christ entails not only following the life-style of Jesus by practicing the evangelical counsels but also continuing His mission and ministry of proclaiming God's Reign by pastoral care and apostolic activities. Purely contemplative life-style is an exceptional call. As the Church is by its very nature missionary, so is the consecrated life essentially apostolic and missionary. Founders and foundresses of religious institutes were prompted by the Spirit to interpret the signs of the times and to respond to the needs of the Church and that of the society.<sup>2</sup>

(3) *Ecclesia semper reformanda* is the classical theological dictum as well as the practical norm of its life. As the Church is both divine and human and it shares the nature of all human institutions, it requires

continuous reform. Whatever exists in history and time is subjected to change. Every student of ecclesiology knows the developments in the Church in the course of history, developments in the administrative structures and ministerial patterns, in the ways of worship and liturgy, in theological thinking, in laws and discipline etc. We are aware of the great changes made by the Vatican II in several areas of the Church's life and mission. As forms of consecrated life and religious institutes are human and part of the institutional Church, they too require continuous reform and renewal. History of every religious order clearly illustrates the radical changes they underwent in the course of history.

(4) The fundamental norms and guidelines for the renewal of religious life are given by the Council. The essence of consecrated life is the radical following of Christ as proposed by the Gospel. The fundamental norm of renewal is therefore return to Christ and the Gospel. What is needed for the renewal is not the multiplication of rules and regulations, but a return to the spirit of the Gospel. The decree on the Religious states that "all those who are called by God to practice the evangelical counsels, and who do so faithfully, devote themselves in a special way to the Lord. They imitate Christ the virgin and the poor man who, by an obedience which carried him even to death on the cross, redeemed men and made them holy".<sup>3</sup> The religious orders and institutes are specifically different according to the charisms of the founders and foundresses and the specificity of the apostolic activities they had launched. Therefore the second norm for the renewal is a closer look and faithful following of the charism and orientations of the founders. However, according to the changing times, cultures and needs, the life-style and apostolic activities of the members may need changes. Fidelity to the heritage and charism does not mean a blind following of the past. *Vita consecrata* speaks about a *creative fidelity* on the part of the members who are "invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world".<sup>4</sup> It implies the third norm of renewal, namely, reading the signs of the times and attending to

the urgent needs of the Church and society and respond to them in a creative way. It may demand some daring enterprises and drastic changes in the life and activities of the members. Competent authorities have to decide and take bold steps for renewal. But no renewal is worth the name without interior and spiritual renewal.

(5) One of the basic clarifications given by the Council is the essential relation between the consecrated life and the Church and the ecclesial dimension of the religious life. Though the consecrated life does not belong to the essence and basic structure of the Church and the Church may exist without the state of religious, the consecrated life in the Church arises from the very nature of the Church and points to the fundamental mystery of the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ. *Vita consecrata* emphasized that the consecrated life is *not something isolated and marginal but a reality that affects the whole Church*. "In effect the *consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church* as a decisive element for her mission, since it manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse... it is a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission".<sup>5</sup> "The profession of evangelical counsels *indisputably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church*. This means that the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her basic and characteristic elements, for it expressed her very nature".<sup>6</sup> In the history of the Church the religious played a very vital role especially in the mission of the Church. Their call is for the service of the Church and the Church cannot be what it is without them.

(6) In the pre-Vatican II period it was often said that the religious are in the *state of perfection* and the laity are called to salvation. If you want to be 'perfect', you have to embrace the state of religious life. It was often based on the Biblical passage Mt 19:21, where Jesus said to the rich young man "if you wish to be perfect go and sell all that you possess and give the money to the poor and you will become the owner

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5 VC, 3.

6 VC, 29.

of a treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me". The misconception was corrected by the Council. In *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 5, entitled "The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness", the Council declared that the call to perfection is addressed to all the members of the people of God, and it is not something special for the religious. Christian perfection is the call to follow Christ in his obedience to the father, a call to the perfection of charity in loving God with one's whole heart, whole soul and whole mind and in loving one's neighbour as Christ loved us. This single ideal of perfection is given to all Christians without any distinction of clergy, religious or laity. There are indeed different ways of practising this single ideal. The religious follow this same ideal in their own specific way. Consecrated life is a specific call, a special gift to some individuals. Only those who have received this gift are able to follow this specific life-style in the Church. However, one cannot say that it is a 'superior' vocation.<sup>7</sup> Every call and gift in the Church is unique, one may not compare them. The fact that in recent times the Popes have canonized several members of the laity from different walks of life declares that the ideal of perfection is in fact possible and attainable to all.

(7) Theology of consecrated life cannot be clearly articulated, as it shares in the mystery of the Church. It is a total consecration to God that draws all the areas of one's life in a new way into the service of God and one's neighbour. It is a deepening of baptismal consecration and a call to radical discipleship. The Church is a sign and sacrament of salvation and of the unity of the whole humankind.<sup>8</sup> The consecrated life is a sign set within the Church reminding all the faithful their final destiny in the Kingdom of God and its transcendence. It reveals the mystery of the Church, of the unbreakable bond between Christ and the Church, His Bride. It makes visible the marvels of God in the frail humanity, a transfigured life capable of amazing the world. Consecrated life is thus an eschatological sign of the world to come.

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7 *Vita consecrata* says that consecrated life has an *objective superiority*, as it clearly manifests the purpose of the Church pointing to the fullness of the Kingdom of God. No.32.

8 LG, 1

(8) In a world where there is profusion of sex and hedonistic culture, worship of mammon and craving for absolute freedom, the practice of evangelical counsels may not be rightly understood by all or even misunderstood by some as obstacles to personality development. Some may think that the practice of evangelical counsels may lead to psychological imbalance and immaturity. This is indeed a misconception. Jesus who was fully man and fully God is the supreme model for the religious. Humanity of Jesus is the most authentic one. He was a man fully for others. Though there is renunciation in consecrated life, its objective is, in fact, to fully liberate oneself for greater self-possession and creativity and universal love by which one is united with the whole humanity in a deeper and abiding fashion. It is illustrated in the heroic lives of so many saints and holy men and women, who were great personalities with self-mastery, enterprising spirit, psychological and affective maturity, dedicated to God and fellow humans with an outgoing universal love and self-sacrifice. Their lives were a joyful and liberating experience.

*Vita Consecrata* tried to clarify the anthropological significance of evangelical counsels.<sup>9</sup> Practice of the evangelical counsels, far from involving an impoverishment of true human values, leads instead to their transformation. Freedom, material possessions and sexuality are all human values. But in the context of sinful human nature there is a tendency to absolutize them leading to the idolatry of the created. All these values have to be relativized before the supreme value of God. Imposed poverty is indeed an evil and it is man-made. It has to be eradicated from the face of the earth. On the contrary, voluntary poverty is a noble option in many religions and it has a deeper meaning when it is for the sake of the Reign of God and in prophetic protest against the imposed poverty and its eradication. Vow of voluntary poverty is an expression of preferential option for the poor. Celibate life is not a denial of love, on the contrary, it transcends the limits of natural love, intensifies and purifies it and elevates it to a higher universal and radical level, embracing the whole humanity. Freedom is not doing what one likes,

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9 VC, 87 – 92.

but taking the right option, the fundamental good of human person. For human person the right choice is to do God's will, as Jesus did and for which he came. Community is the privileged space, where one can discern the will of God for oneself in the company of others and accomplish it in one's life, walking together with the members of a community with one mind and one heart.

(9) Consecrated life is primarily a prophetic call. *Vita Consecrata* emphasized it by saying that it is *a special form of sharing in Christ's prophetic office*.<sup>10</sup> When Vatican II spoke about the *sign value* of consecrated life, what is meant is the prophetic witness of the religious to the primacy of God and the truths of the Gospel. In the Patristic tradition prophet Elijah is the model of monastic tradition, the courageous prophet who stood for the sovereignty of God in defense of the poor against the powerful ones of the world. VC mentions the lessons from the history of the Church, where holy men and women, consecrated to God and inspired by the Holy Spirit exercised this prophetic ministry speaking in the name of God to all, *even to the pastors of the Church*. They courageously announced the Word of God and denounced sin and evil even in high places without any fear. The phenomenon of a tension or conflict or clash between the institutional (hierarchical) and the charismatic (prophetic) elements is clearly evident in the dynamics of the history of the Church. We shall speak about it in the next section.

## II

### Challenges and Problems Today

After having seen some of the new perspectives and orientations given by the recent documents of the Church on Consecrated Life, we shall now address to some of the problems and challenges the religious are facing today. I am not going into the details of all the issues and problems.

(1) All the religious Congregations and Institutes, without any exception, are at a historical juncture entering into a new era for which

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<sup>10</sup> VC, 84.

most of us are unprepared. Some people may call this moment as a crisis; others may see it as an opportunity for growth and change. The problem is that we find ourselves in a situation where we are unable to continue anymore our ancient monastic piety, traditions, life-style and practices. Most of our members are deeply involved in different apostolic activities, both traditional and modern, including new frontier ministries. From morning to evening, even till late night, they are fully busy with their work, whether in schools of different kinds, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, mission stations, cultural centres, youth clubs, social projects, media, self-help groups, and hundreds of other activities. The casualty is some of our traditional monastic traditions and the community life. Meditation in the morning and evening, eucharistic liturgy, prayer of the hours three times a day, rosary, examination of conscience twice a day, *lectio divina*, spiritual reading, adoration, way of the cross etc are some of the exercises in the daily time-table of many religious orders and institutes. It goes without saying that those who are involved in the apostolic activities the whole day are unable to continue or join the community in these spiritual practices and devotions. Constitutions, Statutes, rules and time-tables of the communities still remain unchanged. Practically many members are unable to observe or follow them. Most of the General Chapters of the religious communities hitherto have not openly and boldly addressed to this situation and tried to find a solution.

The religious have to read the signs of the time and respond to needs of God's people and that of the Church. The ecclesial, apostolic and missionary dimension essential to consecrated life demands that the religious orders and institutes of today should take up different sorts of apostolic activities and new initiatives under the guidance of the Spirit. They cannot be all the time on Mount Tabor under the radiance and glory of the transfigured Christ, but they have to climb down the mountain and be with the people in their day-to-day lives and struggles as Jesus did. Some of the age-old monastic traditions, rules and life-style have to be changed in response to the situations and needs of the time. Unless we are able to see the face of Christ in the people with whom we work and ready to wipe out their sweat and tears, we will not succeed in encountering Christ within the cloister or in the pages of the Bible. Of

course, Life and activities of all the religious communities cannot be patterned in the same way. We may perhaps think of one hour prayer in the morning combining meditation, prayer of the hours and liturgy, and one hour prayer session in the evening before the supper which may include prayer of the hours, meditation and adoration. I am only suggesting some direction for solving the present dilemma.

(2) The declaration of the manifesto of Jesus at the synagogue of Nazareth is the heart of the Gospel, 'to preach Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the captives, to give sight back to the blind, to set the oppressed free and to declare a year of favour from the Lord' (Lk 4: 16-19). This is the programme and agenda of the Church and that of the consecrated persons. Inspired by the Spirit, the founders and foundresses of religious orders spent their lives to implement this programme of Jesus in their own way with their own charism. The consecrated persons are called to witness to the simplicity of Christ and the spirit of the Beatitudes.<sup>11</sup> How do we witness to this 'preferential option' for the poor today? There is a widespread complaint today that the life-style and living standard of the religious corresponds to the rich and the super-rich. Our new institutions of universities, CBSC, ICSE, and other International schools, super-specialty hospitals and our own residences attached to them betray the look of luxury and of super-rich. Appearance of their posh look may be unavoidable, as these institutions are for the public and as they have to compete with other similar institutions. The question is perhaps how the members of the religious communities who administer, work, and stay and lead them can still have a simple life-style and how they can live in solidarity with the common people and the poor. Are our quality educational institutions accessible also to the poor? Do we have a declared public policy in this matter? How are we going to support and implement the Central Government's Bill on Right to Free Education? Could the Churches and the religious communities stand together on this issue and endorse a united action? Today our social apostolate and frontier ministries have more witnessing value. More and more members of religious

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11 VC 33.

communities have to enter into this new field even opting out of educational institutions, which are too many and are in great competition today.

(3) *Vita Consecrata* speaks at length on the importance of formation at different levels including ongoing formation.<sup>12</sup> The ultimate objective of formation is conformity with Jesus Christ who is the model for all. The formees should be trained to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus for which they are supposed to have both the gift and the competence or skills. There is complaint from all quarters that our clerical and religious formation today is inadequate, and even after 12–15 years of long formation the outgoing students are ill-equipped. Quality and natural talents of the candidates, motivation, academic standards, character, maturity, spiritual vision and depth and even physical health of the candidates are said to be average or below average. The main problem is our formation in major seminaries, where the students live in very big institutions surrounded by high walls with all kinds of comforts and amusements and they are in a way isolated from the day-to-day lives and struggles of the people. Long years of such training will ill-equip them to face the life-problems and struggles of the common people. God is undoubtedly present in the midst of His people and the students must be able to discern the presence, power and action of the Spirit and join hands with it. Another important top priority has to be a radical revision of the academic curriculum both in theology and philosophy that needs to be tuned to the Indian and Asian socio-cultural context.

(4) The problem in priestly and religious formation is essentially related to the crisis in vocations. The decrease in vocations is alarming in most of the Western countries including South America. India is also slowly being affected. It is evident that vocation to priestly and religious life depends on the social situation. As the social scenario in India is rapidly changing, the number of vocations is in decrease. It has already affected our women Congregations, and sooner or later it will affect also the men Congregations. All the dioceses and the Church at large have to encourage and promote vocations to consecrated life. Here again

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12 VC 65-71.

there is a serious complaint that parish priests and diocesan vocation promoters discourage vocations to consecrated life or they monopolize the vocations for diocesan seminaries. It is also alleged that they often recruit more candidates than needed and later weed out them after a year. As consecrated life is an essential element for the life of the Church, Bishops, parish priests and religious should closely collaborate in the promotion of vocation to religious life. We must arrive at a consensus on the co-operation between the diocesan vocation promoters and that of the religious communities. The vocation promoters of the religious communities must be given free access to the parishes and schools and the parish priests have to give their full co-operation.

(5) Ever since the beginning of religious orders, there has been some tension and conflicts between the hierarchy of the Church and the religious communities. It is in a way inherent and arises out of their different nature and function. As mentioned above, the phenomenon of a tension or polarization or clash between the institutional (hierarchical) and the charismatic (prophetic) is clearly evident in the dynamics of the history of the Church. Whenever the institutional/hierarchical elements become more dominant at the expense of the charismatic/prophetic in the Church, the latter reasserts itself in the forms of various spiritual and prophetic movements and persons/communities. The origins of various religious movements/institutes (Orders and Congregations) may be explained and understood as the assertion of the spiritual/prophetic vs. the extreme tendencies of the institutional and the hierarchical elements in the Church. Naturally there has been always a tension/clash between the religious and the hierarchy in the history of the Church. However, it should not be forgotten that some religious orders/congregations emerged in history in response to the apostolic/missionary needs and challenges of the Church with the initiative of the official Church.

There are several models of the relationship between the hierarchical Church and the religious orders/movements/congregations. In one model, the religious order is initiated by the hierarchical Church to serve its needs or to face certain challenges of the time. Here the religious order and life is totally controlled by the hierarchy and the

official Church to meet its needs. What is at stake here is the charism and the prophetic voice and witnessing of the religious, their legitimate autonomy and freedom. In another model, though the religious movement and congregation have a spontaneous and charismatic/prophetic origin by a charismatic founder/founders, it may be later totally controlled by the hierarchical Church to suit its needs and apostolate. The charismatic and prophetic dimensions gradually disappear, and it becomes part of the institutional Church. In a third model, the religious order has its origin in a charismatic/prophetic person or persons to fulfill a vacuum in the Church or to challenge some institutional/hierarchical distortions or corruptions. Here the danger is that the religious movement/ order may function as a 'parallel Church'. It may later separate itself from the official Church. Several other models of religious life may be identified or conceived.

A healthy model of the relationship between the hierarchical Church and the Religious may be described as follows: The religious movement/order has its origin in one or more founders who are charismatic and prophetic persons. They start the movement in response to the impulse of the Spirit in the historical context of certain challenges, both in the Church and in the world. The hierarchical Church discerns the movement of the Spirit in such persons and communities and later recognizes them officially, and allows them to function in an autonomous way according to their charism and respects their rightful autonomy and identity. The hierarchy co-operates with the religious and promotes them in all possible ways without imposing their authority and rules on them. The religious movement on its part, respects the hierarchical Church and its rules and regulations, and offers its services to the Church. The charism and services of the religious are specifically different from the services of the diocesan priests. However, in case of special situations and circumstances the religious should be ready to help the dioceses and the hierarchical Church in taking up ordinary pastoral ministry. But the main thrust of the religious communities is indeed charismatic/prophetic.

VC underlines this healthy relationship between the hierarchy and the religious.<sup>13</sup> Bishops should help the religious to grow and flourish

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13 VC 45 – 47.

according to the spirit of their founders and foundresses. Bishops should welcome them in the dioceses with great generosity and warmth and respect their rightful autonomy. On the other hand the religious orders and institutes should show respect and reverence to the Bishops and obey them in matters pertaining to the dioceses and fully co-operate with the Bishops and the diocesan clergy. The exempt Orders or those of the Pontifical Right are under the Roman Pontiff in order to make available their services to the Universal Church. This will naturally take us to the next point on the religious and their universal mission.

(6) When a religious community grows and crosses the boundaries of dioceses and of the Individual Churches and offers its services to the other Individual Churches and to the Universal Church, it gets special recognition from the Roman Pontiff. Such Religious Communities or Orders shall not be exclusively controlled by the dioceses or by one Individual Church, though they have their origins there. Rather these Orders or Congregations should be ready to function in a multi-ritual way forming special provinces or units in other Individual Churches too. Their freedom and universal mission shall not be curtailed by the different Individual Churches with the claim that they originally belonged to them. I make this special reference in the context of the thinking of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church and of some of its instructions and statements. My humble request and suggestion to the Syro-Malabar Synod is to avoid any tendency to control and dictate to the religious, but encourage them and support them in taking up missions in other continents and Individual Churches.

The Religious Congregations having their origin in the Syro-Malabar Church are facing today tremendous problems, conflicts and opposition in their missions outside the territory. For the Bishops of the Latin Church outside the territory of the Syro-Malabar Church, they are intruders and they are unwanted. The Latin Hierarchy does not give them permission to buy land and start any institution, whether educational or social or missionary. The Latin hierarchy has strong suspicion against the intentions and interests of the Syro-Malabar religious missionaries. The members of the religious communities have been always the avant-

garde in the mission of the Church into the four corners of the world. With the grace of God and the power of the Spirit they can overcome all obstacles.

(7) The last point I want to raise is the question of the equal dignity and role of consecrated women which VC has specially mentioned.<sup>14</sup> In a world where there is still domination of men and discrimination against women on the one hand, and a new self-awareness of women's equal dignity and equality on the other, the Church must take up boldly prophetic action to end this unjust discrimination as Jesus did without fearing the consequences. VC invites women religious to come forward and speak out on the basis of their experience in the Church and in the world and eliminate certain one-sided perspective in the Church and thus to safeguard the dignity of women and make their unique contribution to the life and mission of the Church. There are age-old complaints that women religious are not properly heard, they are dictated by bishops and diocesan priests and exploited as a cheap labour force, their charism and gifts are not taken seriously, they are not represented in the decision making bodies of the Church, they are not encouraged to specialize in theological subjects and teach and thus make their unique contribution to theology. Unless and until women take up their proper place and role in the Church and society, the humanity will remain incomplete, imbalanced and defective.

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14 VC 57.

# Monastic Traditions and Apostolic Communities in Conflict?

**Mathew Paikada**

The author briefly examines the history of the evolution of religious life in the Church starting with the Desert Fathers till the most modern Secular Institutes. He also examines the official teachings of the Church on Religious Life, especially of Vatican II, which called for appropriate renewal of the styles and modes of religious institutes. In the name of renewal and adaptation, there is a widespread tendency of Apostolic Orders becoming monastic and contemplative and vice versa. This is dangerous to the identity and mission of each specifically different religious institute. The author of this article, Mathew Paikada ofm Cap, is a well-known writer and theologian who is professor at the Capuchin Theologate at Thellakom Kottayam and currently the Provincial of Kottayam Province.

## 1. Statement of the Problem

Are the Institutes of Consecrated Life today undergoing a process of hybridization accepting various aspects of consecrated life irrespective of their original vocation and charism? We can find in the Church three basic types of Consecrated Life, viz. Monastic Institutes, Religious Institutes of Apostolic Life and Secular Institutes. We cannot ignore a current tendency of some Religious Institutes of Apostolic Life to fall back on the vestiges of monastic life-style and customs aspiring for a deeper spiritual life and renewal in consecration and commitment. On the other hand there is even a stronger current whereby the members of

some institutes of Religious Life are breaking out from their isolation into the secular world hoping to find God in the midst of their fellow-men, thereby changing themselves to a sort of secular institutes. If it were merely a problem of classification and juridical status of the institutes, we could ignore them as external or peripheral changes. But this does not seem to be the case here. We cannot fail to notice that it is the very vocation and fidelity to the founding charism of the institutes that is called into question. There seems to be a growing ambiguity regarding the nature of specific charisms given as gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and the world in the changing circumstances of history and society. Is it legitimate that a Religious Congregation spontaneously adapt itself to the customs and traits of monastic communities for reasons of making itself relevant or for attracting vocations? Is it justifiable that a Religious Institute declare itself to be a secular institute in view of professionalism and effectiveness of its ministry? Certainly we don't intend to question the goodwill of the Institutes of Religious Life in their attempts at modernization and renewal. In our search for an adequate answer to the problem we have posed, we have to go into the historical circumstances of the evolution of Consecrated life in the Church as well as the magisterial documents regarding the nature and purpose of Institutes of Consecrated Life.

## 2. Foundational Contexts of Various Forms of Consecrated Life

### *a. The origins of Monasticism*

Consecrated life, though clad in multifarious attires, is almost as old as the Church itself. It has been always regarded with high esteem (VC 35). Hermits were the first on the scene, who, leaving their homes as well as their near and dear ones, entered the desert to lead a life totally consecrated to God. In fact the term 'hermit' is derived from the Greek word '*eremos*' meaning desert. In ancient Egypt and Syria the rocky dry lands surrounding the irrigated fields were called 'desert'. The difficult situation of the desert with sparse vegetation, thorny bushes, scarce water sources and modest temperature provided ideal environment for the ascetics who wanted to have solitude and penitential life in their

search for God-experience. They sought a deeper knowledge of the universe and human life as well as the mystic ecstasy in which they felt themselves united with God. It was not unusual that the ordinary people who recognized the holiness of these people visited them and brought food to them while seeking their spiritual advice and blessings. St. Antony of Egypt (251-356) is the first well-known hermit and gradually eremitical movement began to spread in Egypt and Syria. They were generally solitary ascetics, although the experienced hermits gladly initiated the newcomers. Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, who wrote the biography of St. Antony, was instrumental for spreading the ascetical life to the West during his exile in the West.

Gradually it was found that, in spite of the best intentions, all could not thrive to live such rigorous ascetic life without the support of a community and fixed time table. Thus arose the 'cenobites' (meaning 'life in common'), who lived in close proximity while still maintaining a life of isolation. Pachomius (290-346) led this type of consecrated life by writing down a Rule, according to which the hermits came together for meals, but kept strict silence and meditation. They were expected to cultivate whatever is necessary for their sustenance. St. Basil (330-379), the Father of Eastern Monasticism, further developed this form of life by writing a comprehensive Rule, under which the monks lived, prayed and worked together. They lived a common life based on moderation and fellowship. The extreme asceticism was given up in favour of common life of the monks. (The word 'monk' is derived from the Greek word '*monakos*', which literally means 'alone'. Initially the word stood for unmarried ascetics who lived 'alone', but gradually it acquired a deeper meaning; i.e. a person who is 'one' in his inmost being, who is united within himself, a person with a single desire of union with God).

Benedict of Nursia (480-543) is known as the Father of monasticism in the West, especially on account of the Rule he wrote for the monks of Monte Cassino, the great monastery he founded in Italy. Regularity, moderation and discipline regulated the common life of the monks, which was equally divided between work, prayer and sleep (rest).

While the Eastern monks were named 'athletes of Christ', the Benedictines were known as the 'soldiers of Christ'. The military imagery became a permanent aspect of Western monasticism and Christianity itself. The life of the monks, including the abbot, was strictly guided by the Rule and the community had to read and discuss on the Rule chapter by chapter, beginning over again, once they completed it. Although the abbot had complete control over the monastery as stipulated in the Rule, there was equality of status, transparency and shared responsibility. This style of governing seems to have had a great impact on the Western civilization.

In short, the members of these monastic communities publicly profess the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and consecrated chastity and live a common life according to the Rule and Constitutions of their institutes which may take the form of monastic or apostolic life. Monastic communities focus on the common life and common prayer. Each monastery has an autonomous government, a cloistered area of the house, and hold silence and solitude as important values. Some monasteries are exclusively contemplative and cloistered and spend their time in prayer for the Church and the world. The monastic communities generally have a fourth vow of stability, i.e., they remain at the same house for their lifetime.

### ***b. The Mendicant Orders and Apostolic Congregations***

The three main mendicant Orders which came to existence in the 13<sup>th</sup> century are the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans), and the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Carmelites). Whereas the monastic Orders were rural institutions marked by a retreat from secular society, the mendicants were urban foundations organized to engage secular city life and to meet the needs such as education, preaching and service to the poor. Francis of Assisi was advised to join one of the existing Religious Orders, which he resisted successfully. Clare of Assisi was put tremendous pressure by popes Gregory IX and Alexander IV to give up strict poverty according to the 'form of life' she had accepted from St. Francis and to join the newly

founded 'Order of St. Damian', which was based on the Benedictine Rule. The name 'mendicant' comes from the corporate poverty which they practice in addition to individual poverty. In addition to poverty, the mendicants have another common characteristic, namely, combining religious life with various forms of priestly, apostolic, missionary or charitable ministry.

The next major development in Religious Institutes was the founding of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) by Ignatius Loyola (1491 – 1556). This religious society was founded with the explicit intention of serving the foreign missions. However they were actively involved in the Counter Reformation Movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The society was marked by several innovations to meet the goals intended. They were freed from the commitments of common life, which allowed them to minister individually in distant places. The long years of theological formation and academic education equipped them to represent the intellectual tradition of the Church and contribute to the cultural development (especially education) of the society even in isolation. The Capuchins (OFM Cap), a reform branch of the Franciscans, received their independent status as an Institute of active missionary and apostolic activities on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1528. Their heroic service to the victims of plague that ransacked Italy in the sixteenth century and their missionary commitment from the early days of 'Propaganda Fide' characterized their life and mission. The period of greatest growth of apostolic communities was in the wake of the French Revolution in early 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in France and Belgium. The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (MSFS) was founded by Fr. Mermier, who longed to work for evangelization ("I want missions") in 1838 in Annecy, France. The Religious Institute of the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB) was founded in Turin, Italy and was ecclesiastically approved in 1873. Don Bosco formulated their mission as "the Christian perfection of its associates obtained by the exercise of spiritual and corporal works of charity towards the young, especially the poor, and the education of boys to the priesthood". Numerous religious institutes of women too were founded during this period and they concentrated on running schools, hospitals

and new missionary enterprises around the world. Apostolic or 'active' communities focus on ministry to the Church and to the world. Living a common life, they are "in" the world but "of" the world. They maintain a balance between prayer and active ministry. All of them are committed to the spread of the Gospel each in a manner shaped by the charism of the institute.

Many 'Societies of Apostolic Life', who are not religious in the strict sense, too were founded during this time. They are dedicated to the pursuit of an apostolic purpose, such as educational, medical or missionary work. They do not take religious vows, but live in common, striving for perfection through the observance of their own 'Constitutions'. Some of them make 'bonds' of certain permanence whereby they embrace the evangelical counsels. The Oratorians of St. Philip Neri, the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, the Missionary Society of St. Thomas, etc. fall in this group. The first Societies for Apostolic Life were founded in response to the Church's tendency to impose a cloistered life on the institutes of religious life. Each society in its own particular way pursued a specific apostolic or missionary goal, most often showing a preference for those who are poor and/or marginalized.

### *c. The Secular Institutes*

Chronologically and canonically Secular Institutes were the third type of consecrated life to make its appearance in the Church. During the French Revolution the government attempted to de-christianize the society and had forbidden any form of religious life. During this time secular societies were founded to continue the work of the religious institutes. They did not take the vows or live together in communities to avoid being considered religious societies. However, it was only in 1947 that they were officially recognized as 'a new category of the state of perfection'. Also in the Code of Canon Law of 1983 they are recognized as a form of Consecrated life. They differ from Religious Institutes in that their members live in the ordinary conditions of the world, either alone, in their own families or in fraternal groups.

It was when Pius XII published the *Motu Proprio, Primo Feliciter* on 12th March, 1948 that Secular Institutes gained a status of their own. This document declared that secular Institutes were not camouflaged religious groups, which had got rid of all outward signs of their vocation and continued in private a work which would come out into the open when times 'got better'. No; these were Institutes providentially inspired, having their own place in all times, good and bad alike, founded by a special call of God, different in kind from that of religious Institutes and Societies of the Common Life, with a way of life all their own. This apostolate must be faithfully exercised not only in the world, but, as it were, by using the instruments of the world: that is, through the tasks, professions, and forms of life, the places and circumstances which correspond to this secular condition. It was no longer a question of a supplementary apostolate which happened to be exercised 'in the world', but one fully adapted to all the circumstances of the essentially secular condition.

In the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, especially as is presented in *Lumen Gentium* no.44, the bishops reflected on the Consecrated Life in line with the monastic tradition. They conceived the religious vocation as a consecrated life fully separated from the world, wholly concerned with personal holiness, with eschatological sign and ecclesial witness. However, *Perfectae Caritatis*, the decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, modified many of the positions of *Lumen Gentium*. Although placed within a decree on Religious Life, it finally clarified the state of the secular institutes emphasizing their secular and apostolic character. The significance of the change of accent becomes clear through a comparison between the 1963-draft of the decree and the final text of *Perfectae Caritatis*.

1963 Draft Secular Institutes carry with them a true and *essentially* complete profession, recognized as such by the Church, *although lived out in the world*. This profession, *truly religious in its substance*, confers on those who live in the world, men and women, clergy and laity, *a consecration similar to that of other states of perfection*. Their manner

of practicing perfection supposes that the members of these Institutes live the evangelical counsels in the world. Hence care must be taken that the proper and specific character of these Institutes, while they carry out their apostolate efficaciously in the world, should not be changed by alien forms. Perfectae Caritatis no. 1111. Secular Institutes, although not Religious institutes involve a true and full profession of the evangelical counsels in the world. This profession is recognized by the Church and consecrates to God men and women, lay and clerical, who live in the world. Hence they should make a total dedication of themselves to God in perfect charity their chief aim, and the institutes themselves should preserve their own proper, i.e., secular character, so that they may be able to carry out effectively everywhere in and, as it were, from the world the apostolate for which they were founded.

The above discussions clearly indicate that Secular Institutes are not religious Institutes. They are not a *third* state of perfection after religious Institutes and Societies of the Common Life, but an autonomous institution, in which the consecration to God and to souls is complete and authentic: in other words, this is not a diminished or reduced consecration but one which is real, true and total. Their life is not substantially religious but a consecrated secular life drawing its strength and vigour from its own charism. Their apostolate is secular, exercised not only *in the world*, but *by means of world*, in every situation which is compatible with this life of consecration in perfect charity. If the whole of their life is to be an apostolate, and a secular apostolate, it is obvious that their consecration, like their witness, is secular: action from within, working like the leaven in the mass *in view of the building up and growth of the body of Christ which is the Church*.

### 3. Crossing borders in the name of adaptation and renewal

The Religious create an alternate 'world' in the midst of this world, the *saeculum*. Religious do not simply attempt to live differently in the world, which all Christians must do, but to create a different world which will offer a prophetic witness in, to, and sometimes against the world and even the institutional Church. (Sandra Schneiders). But many members of the Institutes of Religious Life feel that they are forced to

live an outmoded life with many customs and practices typical of monastic life. They may be right since their institutes were founded as apostolic communities to be engaged in active ministry in the world. Changing ecclesiologies (*societas perfecta*, people of God, servant of the Kingdom of God, etc.) and current pastoral needs could have forced them to deviate from the original charism of the founders. In the context of renewal and adaptation they are tempted to adopt the style of the secular institutes with the intention of becoming more relevant and efficient in their life and ministries. In the context of dwindling vocations, this may be also an attempt to attract vocations from the young people. They feel that the outmoded dress code from bygone centuries, compulsory common prayer, submission to the decisions of the community, etc., are useless cumbersome burdens on them. They feel that a secular life style will liberate them from the unnecessary burdens of the past and make their life more attractive and their ministry more efficient. No one can find fault with them if they are trying to be honest to themselves and interpret the situations in favour of those for whom they dedicate their lives in service. However, often it may be a fact that most of them are not well informed about their own founding charism as well as the charism of the secular institutes they want to imitate.

Surprisingly there is also a countercurrent that some of the Religious Institutes try to accommodate more and more of the monastic and contemplative dimensions into their way of life. In the name of inculturation or deepening of the spiritual life they feel that oases of contemplation are to be built into their institutes to project an image of being deeply spiritual. Sometimes it is also interpreted and justified as 'call within the call'. Extra hours of adoration of the Eucharist, strict adherence to common canonical prayers, additional pious exercises as well as fasting and penance, uniformity of dress and life-style irrespective of the type of ministry one is expected to do, etc., are cultivated with all kinds of justifications. Many sisters of active apostolic communities complain that, after eight or even ten hours of work in schools and hospitals, they are directly or indirectly forced to take part in midnight adorations and prayers. Here too, we can't call the good intention of the superiors into question. This may be again a last effort to attract vocations

with large spectrum of possibilities – contemplative as well as active; or it could also be a strategy to make themselves laudable in the eyes of the public and the hierarchy. However sometimes they engage in ministries without any reference to their charism – a kind of jack of all trades: cooks in seminaries, sacristans in the parish, door/phone attendants in bishop's houses, sales girls in church-run shops, etc. It is not seldom that many succumb to the external compulsions or even mere expectations from the parish priests and bishops, who may be more preoccupied with the job to be done rather than with the charism of the Religious sisters.

However the problem is more complex, especially when we view it in the light of the historical development of the various forms of consecrated life explained at the beginning of this essay. Religious Institutes have a long history whose origins lie in a 'cenobitic' way of life entailing separation from the world, solitude, common office in the choir, cloistral observance, the monastic habit, common poverty, dependence on the superior, etc. This image of consecrated life has come to be regarded as the ideal of the 'religious' state. Every adaptation throughout the centuries which has weakened the bonds of traditional monasticism in the interest of the apostolate has been judged as infidelity to consecrated life. Even today this mentality is still very much alive. Religious, dedicated to works of charity, seek to unite monasticism with apostolic action. They lead a double life, a 'mixed' life, seldom properly balanced. The balance they seek can be achieved only in the union of prayer and action in *one* fervent apostolic life embraced for the love of God and fellowmen in institutions suitable to their apostolate. It is interesting to observe that whereas some members of the religious institute try to imitate the monastic life, others try to imitate the style of the secular societies. Naturally within the institutes of religious life tension becomes inevitable as they are pulled in opposite directions.

Although the situations described above may not be widespread, they are definitely not rare and I don't hesitate to see them as symptoms of a deeper malaise which needs urgent attention. Certainly, the ultimate norm of all types of consecrated life is the radical discipleship of Christ as set forth in the Gospels.

#### 4. Restoration of the lost identity and appropriate renewal

The Vatican II was well aware of the ambiguous borders among monasticism, apostolic communities and secular institutes. The Council observed that the unique identity and the rich patrimony of each Religious Institute are often forgotten and they are to be regained thus enriching the Church and the institutes themselves. That is evident from the clear guidelines it gives for renewal. In PC 2 we read: “b)... Therefore let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions - all of which make up the patrimony of each institute - be faithfully held in honor. c) All institutes should share in the life of the Church, adapting as their own and implementing in accordance with their own characteristics the Church’s undertakings and aims in matters biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social”. It is noteworthy that in the same paragraph special emphasis is given to the necessity of gaining adequate knowledge of the social situation in which they have to engage in ministry. Thus we read: “d) Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church. In such a way, judging current events wisely in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to assist men more effectively.” After a legitimate warning that “renewal of spirit takes precedence over active ministry” (PC 2 e), the council becomes more explicit about the way the renewal of the apostolic religious communities, including the manner of governing, should be concretely carried out. “The manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances. According to the same criteria let the manner of governing the institutes also be examined (PC 3). In the Church there are numerous communities, both clerical and lay, which devote themselves to various apostolic tasks. The gifts which these communities possess differ according to the grace which is given to them. “The gifts are varied, but the Spirit is the same” (1 Cor. 12:4). It is of special significance to note that while the

monasteries are allowed to continue some sort of activities of charity to the people in PC 9, the apostolic religious communities, which “closely join the apostolic life to choir duty and monastic observances”, are asked to “adapt their manner of life to the demands of the apostolate appropriate to them”. *Thus it is clear that the vestiges of monastic customs and practices crept into the apostolic communities should be discarded in favour of their typical charism and ministry.*

In *Vita Consecrata* the pope dwells upon the theme again and clearly indicates the complementary character and uniqueness of each type of consecrated life: “... Men and women Religious *completely devoted to contemplation* are in a special way an image of Christ praying on the mountain. Consecrated persons engaged in *the active life* manifest Christ ‘in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the multitudes, in his healing of the sick and the suffering, in his work of converting sinners to a better life, in his solicitude for youth and his goodness to all’. Consecrated persons in *Secular Institutes* contribute in a special way to the coming of the Kingdom of God; they unite in a distinctive synthesis the value of consecration and that of being in the world. As they live their consecration in the world and from the world, ‘they strive to imbue everything with an evangelical spirit for the strengthening and growth of the Body of Christ’” (VC 32). *Fidelity to the distinct original charism is the key to the renewal.* “...In the first place, there is the need for *fidelity to the founding charism* and subsequent spiritual heritage of each Institute. It is precisely in this fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses, an inspiration which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice” (VC 36). Even when the pope calls for a “return to the Rule and Constitutions” to regain the original inspiration of the founders, he is not intending a slavish restorative undertaking, but *a creative and dynamic fidelity to the original charism.* “Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and

spiritual difficulties of daily life. But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God's inspiration and to the Church's discernment" (VC 37).

The most important characteristic that distinguishes the Religious Institutes of Apostolic Life from the Secular Institutes is the aspect of 'community life'. This is amply clear both in the theological reflections and juridical norms regarding apostolic religious communities as well as secular institutes. *Vita Consecrata* provides us with a beautiful theology of 'fraternal life' or 'community life'. It is "more than an instrument for carrying out a specific mission, fraternal communion is a *God-enlightened space* in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord (cf. *Mt* 18:20). This comes about through the mutual love of all the members of the community, a love nourished by the word and by the Eucharist, purified in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and sustained by prayer for unity, the special gift of the Spirit to those who obediently listen to the Gospel" (VC 42). The pope further highlights the ecclesiological and missiological significance of fraternal life and calls upon members of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life to grow in fraternal life. "The whole Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled "with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (*Acts* 13:52). She wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person's commitment to communion is strengthened. The nature of the charism in communities of this kind directs their energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all towards the one mission. If the Church is to reveal her true face to today's world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the "new commandment" (VC 45). This teaching of the pope makes it clear that the members of the religious institutes are not free to choose the lifestyle of the secular institute, where

the obligation to community life is conspicuously absent. Such an attempt will not be an adaptation in view of more efficient ministry but a change in the charism itself. Many members of religious institutes resent monastic practices and separation from the world, as if apostolate is merely tolerated subsidiary or exceptional activity. It is also true that some institutes organize their common life in such a way that ministry is seen as a mere means for livelihood; while for a good spiritual life and personal sanctification one has to undertake monastic practices. Some even misuse biblical references like "Mary has chosen the better part", thus pushing the members involved in fulltime apostolate to the borders of schizophrenia. However, whatever be the attractions of secular institute, the aspect of fraternal life in religious life cannot be compromised in the name of renewal and successful ministry.

## 5. Concluding Observations

Although strict exclusive identities may not be viable among the various types of consecrated life, unreflected random switching over from one to another is found to be a phenomenon endangering true nature of charisms and corresponding ministries. The pre-occupation with efficiency and success cannot be adequate reason for the religious to adopt the lifestyle of the secular institutes. In the same way there is no theological basis to argue that only monastic practices will ensure the spiritual growth of the religious of apostolic ministries. Just as Church is not founded for itself and should not be pre-occupied with itself, the institutes of consecrated life too should not be introverted, self-promoting and self-satisfying groups in the Church. The broader perspective of the Kingdom of God and the prophetic witness and ministry should take precedence in the renewal of the institutes of consecrated life.

It is easily observable that most of the institutes of apostolic life are still having an isolated and insulated novitiate very much in a monastic style. Novitiate has to be re-organized in keeping with the specific charism and ministry of the institute; in our case it has to initiate the novices into an integral spirituality of prayer and action. Further, formation house cannot be an incubator protected and disconnected from the really existing communities and their moral and spiritual niveau. This will have necessary consequences and implications regarding

formation to maturity and personal responsibility. Each institute should decide in a communitarian way, keeping the demands of ministry before the eyes, how much emphasis is to be put on the spatial proximity of the community members and on the common recitation of divine office in an apostolic fraternity. The fundamental question will be whether the formation and training is helpful to appreciate and intensify personal prayer life and community spirit. In conclusion I would like to stress the fact that the vocation and ministry of the institutes of apostolic life has a very valuable place in the life of the Church and society provided they be what they are called to be. Imitation and crossing boundaries will be only counterproductive and self betrayal. We are faced with the task of arriving at the authentic nature of the religious life dedicated to the apostolate. Such a life will be neither monastic nor secular in its nature and mission.

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- <http://www.scourmont.be/studium/bresard/04-rules.html>
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## Hierarchy and the Religious: Partners in Mission

**Jacob Parappally**

A proper and balanced understanding of the roles of the hierarchy and the religious in the fulfilling of the mission of Christ is imperative for the effectiveness of the mission of the Church in the world. The shift of emphasis made by Vatican II both in Christology and Ecclesiology by a servant model and people of God model affects the mission and functioning of all the members of the Church, especially the hierarchy and the religious and their relationship. The author Jacob Parappally highlights the role of both the hierarchy and the religious and their partnership in the common mission of the Church. All misunderstandings and disagreements shall be overcome by frank and fraternal dialogue for the sake of the mission of the Church. Jacob Parappally is a well-known Indian Theologian, the Principal of Tejas Vidya Peetha, Bangalore and the Chief Editor of *Journal of Indian Theology*.

The hierarchy of the Church and the religious in the Church exist in mission and for mission. Their common mission is to proclaim the good news of liberation and wholeness entrusted to them by Jesus Christ, which has to be fulfilled in the power of the Holy Spirit. Both the charism of leadership in the Church and the radical following of Christ through religious life do exist in the Church to fulfill this mission alone. In the Church there is a lot of collaboration and cooperation between hierarchy and religious, aware of their specific vocation and the duties of their

specific charism whether one is in hierarchy or in religious life. They give a common and united witness to the values of the kingdom and are effective. However, human frailties such as small-mindedness, ego problems, tendency to dominate and control, discrimination in the name of gender, class, caste, ethnicity etc. create a situation of mutual suspicion, lack of respect, etc. They deplete the spiritual energy necessary to combat the powers that are waiting to hinder and even destroy the mission of the Church. Therefore, it is imperative that those in hierarchy and the religious realize the source, model and reference point of their commitment to the mission entrusted to the Church.

### **I. The Role of the Hierarchy in the Mission of the Church**

An exhaustive discussion on the role of the hierarchy in view of the mission of the Church is not possible within the space of an article. That is not our purpose too. Following Jesus' method of describing the role of the leaders among the disciples and the disciples as leaders, we are drawn to the insight of Jesus concerning leadership. Jesus does not say what a leader should be but what a leader should not be. The Church is gifted with a hierarchical leadership. The hierarchy in the Church is to fulfill the mission of Christ giving leadership to all believers fostering communion among them. One of the important sections of the Church is the religious who make a radical commitment to follow Jesus and are committed to continue his mission. The hierarchy is entrusted with the task of leading them to fulfill the mission of the Church in a specific way. We have enough texts from the NT and the Church documents that deal with this question of relationship between the hierarchy and the religious. Our attempt is to refer to some of them that are immediately relevant to the theme of our discussion. The relationship between the hierarchy and the religious is as crucial as with the laity for the fulfillment of the mission. Certain incidents that have a serious negative impact on the Church and have become counter-witness to the Church in the context of the relationship between the hierarchy and the religious indicate that some of those in hierarchy and some of the religious have not understood or are not convinced of their roles as "ambassadors of Christ" and "ministers of reconciliation" (cfr I Cor 5:18-20).

The re-visioning of the Church and the ministry in the Church was a Spirit-given insight into the mystery of the Church in the Vatican II. The Decree on the Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* while emphasizing the nature of the Church as a Mystery gave importance to its visible expression in the community of the people of God. It also indicated that the Kingdom of God is epitomized in the Church but is larger than the Church which is at the service of the Kingdom of God. Another very important insight with far reaching consequences was the Council's re-discovery of the truth that the hierarchy is at the service of the people of God or those in the hierarchy are ministers or servants of the people of God and orient the mission of the Church accordingly. All in the hierarchy are given the charism to be the servants of the people of God in order to increase their holiness and assist them to fulfill their mission as members of the common priesthood through baptism. It is in collaborating with the hierarchy with their unique identity and right as religious and laity they continue the mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ and his Kingdom that all may reach the final communion with God, the Absolute communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The understanding of the mission of the Church and the way it is to be accomplished depend on how the hierarchy, the religious and the laity experience, understand and live out the person of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The paradigm or model of Christ which the Church follows would determine its attitudes, relationships, behaviour and life-style. In other words, Christology influences ecclesiology. The paradigm-shift in Christology influenced the self-understanding of the Church and consequently its understanding of the mission in all its aspects. The Christological paradigm that the Church had followed for about sixteen centuries had been the Alexandrian model of Christology. In this paradigm the structure of the Church could be visualized as a pyramid. The hierarchy was considered occupying the positions of power according to the order of offices in the pyramid and the religious and laity at the bottom. In the Alexandrian Christological paradigm the emphasis was given to the Divinity of Christ. The attributes of the Divine Christ had a tremendous influence on the hierarchy. The

Divine Christ is transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, royal, majestic, solemn, all-perfect etc. As representatives of this Divine Christ they had put on themselves some of the dimensions of the Divine Christ in attitudes, behavior, life-style and relationships. Only in a relative way could those in hierarchy express the attributes of the Divine Christ. But in the concrete ecclesial life it had some negative consequences. For example, Christ's transcendence would be expressed by distancing themselves from the other members of the Church. Since they were representing the all-knowing and all-powerful Christ, some of them began to believe that they knew everything concerning what should be done in the place of their leadership and they had unquestioned authority to act without consultation or dialogue with others who were involved and committed to the mission of the Church. This negatively affected the mission of the Church as well as the relationship among the members of the Church gifted with specific and different charisms. When the understanding of authority in the Church representing the divine authority of Christ is mixed with human will to power and domination, the combined power has such a destructive capability to enslave the believer than does any political tyranny. That is the reason, when Jesus found that the disciples were moving away from his kingdom values, he called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:25-28, NIV). Jesus envisioned a *third way* of leadership and enjoined on the disciples to follow it till the end of time setting himself as its model with the promise of his presence till the end of time (Mt.28:20). Therefore, the early Church avoided terms that would evoke dominating structures of Gentile power as well as Jewish cultic power-structure in designating the servant-leadership of its officials. The terms the early church used to designate leaders who would offer their service or ministry of, guiding the community, instructing them on Christian life and leading them in worship were terms like overseer (episkopos), presbyter (elder), deacon(server) etc.

All these titles were taken from the secular society at the time of the early Church.

Contrasting with the domineering and enslaving leadership style of those who have not yet entered into the Kingdom of God, Jesus establishes his servant-leadership as the model of Christian leadership. "But it shall not be so among you" (Mk 10:43) is not an advice but a command equally valid as "love one another" and "go out to the whole world proclaiming the good news" (Mt 28:18). One who gave the command knows the dangerous consequences of such combined forces of power, spiritual as well as the will to power originating from the false ego. A person who is gifted with the charism of ecclesiastical office may claim that he knows everything that is to be known and his judgments are always right. It is absolutely clear that it is impossible to dialogue with such an ecclesiastical authority for the sake of the effective fulfillment of the mission even when the religious or lay people are absolutely certain that the opposite of what he holds is true. The mission entrusted to the Church is thus hampered by some of its own ministers. We can only attribute it to human frailties and narrow-mindedness.

Vatican II ushered in a paradigm-shift in Christology from Alexandrian to Antiochene, from emphasizing the Divinity of Christ to his humanity. There may not be any explicit statement in the Council to establish this theological statement. But the whole vision of the Church and its mission pre-supposes such a paradigm-shift in Christology. Its immediate implication was on the self-understanding of the Church as an inverted pyramid. Some may see it as a circle too. From the reversal of earlier understanding of hierarchy on the top of the pyramid, now on the top of this inverted pyramid was the people of God. The role of those in hierarchy is to be the servants of the people of God and not their masters! Their mission of leadership is to be exercised not by domination and control but by self-emptying service or ministry. The so called orders in hierarchy gave way to ministries; the ruling leadership gave way to servant-leadership. The model of Christ in the Antiochene Christology is "the Son of Man who came to serve and not to be served and to give his life as a ransom for many" Mk 10:45. The call of the Council to be

the servants of the people of God had its implicit basis in the recognition of Jesus, the really and truly human, as its model. The human qualities of Jesus like love, compassion, understanding, caring, sensitivity, respect for others, availability, adjustability, courage to stand for truth come what may, etc., are the hall-marks of the servant-leadership. Washing of the feet of the disciples is set as the attitude the ecclesiastical leader should have in leading and guiding those in his charge. Whatever be his position in the hierarchy he needs to be a loving brother in his shepherding, teaching and sanctifying ministry because in Jesus' kingdom all are brothers and sisters equal in dignity but different in the gifts of charism given for the sake of his Body, the Church and for its mission.

To have a theological vision about the correct role of the hierarchy in exercising their responsibility as the legitimate leaders of the Local Church is one thing but how it is to be practiced is another. Therefore, the Church provides both guidelines and rules that govern such relationships that enhance the mission of the Church. In the context of our discussion on the relationship between the hierarchy and religious we have sufficient documents expressing the way this relationship should be lived in view of the mission. The documents of Vatican II and the motu proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* of Paul VI (6 August, 1966) as well as the celebrated post-synodal document on religious life *Vita Consecrata* give us practical guidelines for the relationship between hierarchy and religious. For example, the decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, says about this relationship seeing it in the right perspective of the mission says:

A well-ordered cooperation is to be encouraged between various religious communities and between them and the diocesan clergy. There should also be a very close coordination of all apostolic works and activities which especially depend upon a supernatural attitude of hearts and minds, rooted in and founded upon charity. The Apostolic See is competent to supervise this coordination for the universal Church; sacred pastors are competent in

their own respective dioceses: and patriarchal synods and episcopal conferences in their own territory. For those works of the apostolate which Religious are to undertake, bishops or episcopal conferences, religious superiors or conferences of major religious superiors should take action only after mutual consultations. In order to foster harmonious and fruitful mutual relations between bishops and religious, at stated times and as often as it is deemed opportune, bishops and religious superiors should meet to discuss those affairs which pertain to the apostolate in their territory.<sup>1</sup>

The *motu proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* further lays down principles for the right relationship between the hierarchy and religious for the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to the Church. It says: "Religious, even the exempt, are bound by the laws, decrees and ordinances enacted by the local Ordinary for various activities, in those matters which touch upon the exercise of the sacred apostolate, as well as for pastoral and social action prescribed or recommended by the local Ordinary."<sup>2</sup> Even though the Episcopal authority is supreme a sincere dialogue with religious authority is required in matters concerning the apostolic activities in which religious are involved. "...The spirit which *Ecclesiae Sanctae* seeks to realize in the relationship between the hierarchy and religious is one of sincere co-operation and mutual respect for respective competencies within the Church."<sup>3</sup> The laws enacted in the document concerning these documents are to be seen as flowing from the theological principles of leadership, mutuality, partnership in mission and for mission based on the servant-leadership of Christ we have already seen. Otherwise, neatly formulated juridical norms can be manipulated by both hierarchy and religious at the cost of the effectiveness of the mission. Therefore, it is also imperative to discuss how the religious see themselves in relation to the hierarchy in fulfilling their vocation to cooperate and collaborate in the mission of the Church.

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1 Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral office in the Church (*Christus Dominus*) No. 35.

2 *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, No. 25 (1).

3 Michael V.Smyth, "The Hierarchy and Religious", *The Furrow*, 21/4 (April, 1970): 219

## II. The Role of the Religious in the Mission of the Church

Religious life in the Church lives and exemplifies what the Church epitomizes, namely, the Kingdom of God. Those who are called to this way of life and have responded whole-heartedly to it, witness to the world in a radical way what the Church lives for, namely, to make present the self-emptying love of Christ. Even when it is lived in silence and seclusion it is a loud proclamation of the mission of the Church. The religious are challenged and enriched by the life of the other members of the Church in living their vocation and fulfilling their mission. The post-synodal document *Vita Consecrata* reminds the religious: "Nor must it be forgotten that consecrated persons themselves are helped by the witness of the other vocations to live fully and completely their union with the mystery of Christ and the Church in its many different dimensions. By virtue of this mutual enrichment, the mission of consecrated persons becomes more eloquent and effective: this mission is to remind their other brothers and sisters to keep their eyes fixed on the peace which is to come, and to strive for the definitive happiness found in God."<sup>4</sup> It is their life-witness that would enable others in the Church as well as in the world to unfold their vocation as humans. Therefore, the Church recognizes religious life as a "particular gift in the life of the Church".<sup>5</sup> It helps the Church to overcome the temptation to emphasize either ecclesiastical nestorianism which is a vision of the Church that dichotomizes the institutional and charismatic dimensions of the Church as well as an ecclesiastical monophysitism that sees the Church only in its mysterious dimension. When the Church is believed to be an institution like "the kingdom of France or the republic of Venice" as Cardinal Bellarmine visualized, then the use of leadership is bound to be exercised like that of any political leadership. Fortunately, this type of vision of the Church is no more considered valid. However, the religious life is seen as expressing the charismatic dimension of the Church as a constant reminder to the entire Church and to the hierarchy in particular that the Church's institutional structure is for the sake of the charism of loving service to the entire humanity for its liberation

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4 *Vita Consecrata*, No.33      5 *Lumen Gentium*, No. 43

and salvation. Further, it challenges the institutional structures of the Church not to take upon the values of the power structures of the world and also to be at the service of its charism and not vice-versa. The self-understanding of the religious life itself that it is the charismatic dimension of the Church can never be overemphasized especially in our times when religious life itself has become highly institutionalized and its visible expression in the society is more by institutions they conduct in all fields rather than by their radical commitment to a life of witness.

If the call to renewal of religious life to all religious institutes by the Vatican II Council further explained and expanded with a theological foundation and concrete orientation for life are taken seriously, religious life can fulfill its role as the charismatic dimension of the Church in the world. According to J. Danielou religious life belongs to the Church charismatically and not to its hierarchical structure.

This charismatic aspect will remain a characteristic of the religious life. The fathers of the desert and the stylites are charismatics. The great religious orders are of charismatic origin. They witness the liberty of the Spirit in the heart of the Christian community. Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Ignatius, and Teresa are expressions of the charismatic action of the Spirit in the building of the Church alongside her hierarchical action. The orders which they founded are the necessary institutionalization of these charismata to assure the permanence of their presence in the Church.<sup>6</sup>

Being faithful to their vocation to remain the charismatic dimension of the Church they must submit themselves to the guidance of the hierarchy in fulfilling the mission entrusted to them. They are collaborators in the mission of the Church through their life-witness and apostolic activities. Based on the teaching of the Vatican II, the post-synodal document *Vita Consecrata* reminds the religious that they are "asked to be true experts of communion and to practice the spirituality

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6 J. Danielou, "The Place of Religious in the Church", *Review for Religious*, 24 (July, 1965): 520

of communion as 'witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design'. The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a *spirituality of communion*, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension."<sup>7</sup> The religious are called to think with the Church which is a mystery of communion and to promote communion within the Church and its mission of proclaiming the God of communion inviting all humans to enter into that communion. Therefore, the religious must be catalysts of communion. And it presupposes their life of communion with the hierarchy which is meant to lead and guide, teach and sanctify the entire Church to fulfill its mission. This expresses itself with their life of communion with the hierarchy that is established to lead and guide, teach and sanctify the entire Church to fulfill its mission.

A distinctive aspect of ecclesial communion is allegiance of mind and heart to the Magisterium of the Bishops, an allegiance which must be lived honestly and clearly testified to before the People of God by all consecrated persons, especially those involved in theological research, teaching, publishing, catechesis and the use of the means of social communication. Because consecrated persons have a special place in the Church, their attitude in this regard is of immense importance for the whole People of God. Their witness of filial love will give power and forcefulness to their apostolic activity which, in the context of the prophetic mission of all the baptized, is generally distinguished by special forms of cooperation with the Hierarchy.<sup>8</sup>

The hierarchy is bound by its God-given responsibility to encourage, support and guide the religious in fulfilling their religious vocation as both the hierarchy and the religious have the same source, the power of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish what they are called to. At the same time the hierarchy has the legitimate authority to re-direct,

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7 *Vita Consecrata*, No.33.

8 *Ibid.*, No.46

control and even suppress the activities of the religious if they go against the expressed mission of the Church in a particular diocese and if the activities of the religious have become a counter-witness to it. Therefore, it is imperative for the effectiveness of the life and apostolate of the religious that they remain in dialogue and in close relationship with the local ordinary in the bond of brotherly love and pastoral charity.

The Bishop is the father and pastor of the particular Church in its entirety. It is his task to discern and respect individual charisms, and to promote and coordinate them. In his pastoral charity he will therefore welcome the charism of the consecrated life as a grace which is not restricted to any one Institute, but which benefits the whole Church. Bishops will thus seek to support and help consecrated persons, so that, in communion with the Church, they open themselves to spiritual and pastoral initiatives responding to the needs of our time, while remaining faithful to their founding charism. For their part, consecrated persons will not fail to cooperate generously with the particular Churches as much as they can and with respect for their own charism, *working in full communion with the Bishop* in the areas of evangelization, catechesis and parish life.

By following the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience for the sake of the Kingdom, the religious are called to follow Jesus radically in their lives. The decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis* insists that, "Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule."<sup>9</sup> However, this cannot be construed to hold the view that the religious have their primary commitment to Christ and it is only in a secondary manner to the Church and in a conflict situation they can hide behind the primary commitment and neglect the other. Such polarization of commitment to Christ and the Church is both detrimental to religious life and the Church.

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9 *Perfectae Caritatis*, No.2

The radical commitment of the religious is to Christ in the Church. Christ is beyond the Church and yet not apart from the Church. Therefore, religious life as a legitimate form of living Christian discipleship is meaningful only within the Body of Christ, the Church. Therefore, it is the duty of both hierarchy and the religious to preserve it, nurture it and allow it to produce the fruit of living witness to values of the Kingdom for the glorification of God and for the edification of all humans.

### **III. The Partnership of the Hierarchy and the Religious for Mission**

The Church being essentially missionary it is imperative that all its members who are directly and immediately involved in the mission of the Church (whether they are members of the hierarchy or members of the religious congregations) are aware they are partners in the same mission. They need to think that they are on the same side and make form the same front for the effective implementation of the programme of proclaiming the good news and gathering people and deepening the Christian life. They are not to pull in different directions leading to competition and confusion hurting the purpose of their Christian commitment. They need to recognize that the charisms are different and have to respect the differences of functions proceeding from the charism. All the charisms have the same source, God the Father, same mediation, of the Son and the same agent of distribution, the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church (I Cor 12:4-11). Recognizing the equality of persons, equality of dignity through the same baptism, sameness of the purpose that is building up of the Body of Christ must be the foundation of any partnership in and for mission. In this sense nobody is superior or inferior, higher or lower. However, those who have been gifted with the charism of leadership are to exercise it with self-emptying love and servant-leader attitude and those who have the charism of religious life must exercise the mission in obedience to the hierarchy. Both the hierarchy and religious have to discern together what contributes to the perfection of charity, deepening of faith, increase of holiness and effectiveness of the proclamation of liberation and salvation to those to whom they are sent.

In the concrete situations of pastoral life there can arise unhealthy tensions between hierarchy and the religious for the simple reason of human weakness and an inability to see beyond the immediate benefits for one party or the other. Though there exist clearly defined rules and regulations that govern the relationship between the local ordinary and the religious congregations in matters of establishing communities and carrying out apostolate etc., problems can arise because of the changes in diocesan policies or in religious institutes' difficulties in continuing certain ministries. Sometimes even temporal/non religious matters like dispute over property, buildings, institutes and other material possessions which may not have anything to do with the mission directly create problems of relationship between the hierarchy and religious. It is very unfortunate when the partners in mission cannot see beyond their particular narrow interests and resort to court cases to settle disputes and become victims of those who manipulate both hierarchy and religious for their own advantage at the cost of the mission and the credibility of both the hierarchy and religious. Certain superiority feeling among some members of the religious vis-à-vis the diocesan clergy, and the arrogance of some religious men and women in dealing with them when they approach them for one reason or another regarding matters concerning the public institutions run by the religious create certain ill-feeling that are detrimental to the common mission of the Church

The religious who are in clerical state being a part of the presbyterium may not experience many difficulties. But when the religious institutes are not willing to part with certain pastoral responsibilities originally entrusted to them by the local ordinary there can be serious difficulties affecting the relationship between the hierarchy and the religious. The religious must always realize that they are only collaborators and not leaders like a bishop who has the supreme responsibility of planning, organizing and executing the apostolate of the diocese. Whatever be the best intention of a religious institute they cannot claim any pastoral activity unless entrusted to them by the legitimate hierarchical authorities for they hold the ultimate responsibility for fulfilling the mission of the Church in a diocese. However, by any

highhandedness in executing their duty as pastors of the local Church or a parish, they will do a great disservice and harm to the Church and its mission.

In most cases the relationship between the hierarchy and the religious suffer from a lack of proper understanding of partnership for mission at the parish level where the priest and women religious enter into conflict affecting the mission and the credibility of their witness to the Gospel values. In majority of cases the most affected party would be the women religious. Whether we like it or not, one has to admit that with all spiritual evolution and growth in our theological understanding as the disciples of Christ and as a Church we have not completely cut the umbilical chord of the cultic and patriarchic tradition of the Jewish religion. The male-domination of the Jewish society has entered into the Church through the back door. In the Kingdom Jesus preached and ushered in through his life, death and resurrection there are only brothers and sisters - God's children. In fact, the message of equality of all, whether men or women, Jew or Gentile has not sunk into the world-view of many Christians. The exercise of patriarchy in the Church is often justified by spiritualizing it. But in the concrete circumstances it expresses itself as the discrimination of women even though the Church as a community of all the baptized would not advocate it.

For many bishops and priests it is still difficult to accept women religious as equal partners in mission and take them into confidence for planning, organizing and executing pastoral plans and programmes. Some of the women religious have internalized patriarchal values and mistake servile submission as religious obedience and allow themselves to be dehumanized. Neither those in hierarchy with such anti-kingdom attitude nor those who submit to it with a false sense of obedience do justice to the liberating mission of Jesus that promises integral growth and wholeness to all. Therefore, it is imperative that the hierarchy and the religious become self-critical in the exercise of their specific charisms and enter into dialogue with mutual respect and humility in order to find ways and means of effectively fulfilling their mission.

When those in hierarchy and those who are religious realize that they are partners *in* mission and *for* mission they will be able to see the principles of mutuality, subsidiarity and collective discernment that would enhance their relationship as well as the effectiveness of their common mission. One of the important principles in working together whether for spiritual or temporal purposes is that there is no commitment without involvement. Those in hierarchy need to take the religious into confidence and involve them in the *decision-making* processes. This is already envisaged in the documents concerning the relationship between the hierarchy and the religious.<sup>10</sup> The religious need to submit to *decisions taken* by the hierarchy presuming that the right discernment is made by both before decision-making and decision-taking without any hidden agendas, manipulations, political interests, ego-trips, one-upmanship etc. by the partners in the mission. Such a partnership for mission would further the dawn of the Kingdom, for all who seek the Lord with a sincere heart actualize the missionary mandate given to the Church by its Lord and Master.

## Conclusion

The servant-leadership lived and proclaimed by Jesus is the style of leadership that is to be exercised by those who are given the charism of leadership, namely, the members of the hierarchy in the Church. The hierarchy has the mission of gathering charisms of the members of the Church to fulfill its mission of proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom. While the hierarchy belongs to the institutional dimension of the Church mediating divine grace and energy, the religious belong to the charismatic dimension of the Church testifying the power of the Spirit which renews everything. Both those in hierarchy and the members of the religious institute are called to fulfill the God-given vocation to continue the mission of the Church by fostering communion, mutual collaboration and respect for their specific roles in order to fulfill the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, No. 29-30.

mission entrusted to them. As human weakness can invade even the sublime and noble purposes, the mission can also be negatively affected by the problems of relationship between the hierarchy and the religious. Therefore, it is imperative that both the hierarchy and the religious become self-critical and enter into genuine dialogue to overcome prejudices if there any and foster collaboration and cooperation among them for the sake of the mission. This is also important for their own unfolding as persons through the specific charisms gifted to them for the sake of the Body of Christ. A distinctive aspect of ecclesial communion is allegiance of mind and heart to the Magisterium of the Bishops, an allegiance which must be lived honestly and clearly testified to before the People of God by all consecrated persons, especially those involved in theological research, teaching, publishing, catechesis and the use of the means of social communication. Because consecrated persons have a special place in the Church, their attitude in this regard is of immense importance for the whole People of God. Their witness of filial love will give power and forcefulness to their apostolic activity which, in the context of the prophetic mission of all the baptized, is generally distinguished by special forms of cooperation with the Hierarchy. In a specific way, through the richness of their charisms, consecrated persons help the Church to reveal ever more deeply her nature as the sacrament "of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"(VC 46.)

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## Religious Life and Commitment to the Poor

### Sunny Thottapally

Religious life in the Church is the radical and intense following of Christ. Unless the religious and religious institutes make an uncompromising option for the poor and ready to live with the poor and committed to eradicate poverty, misery and exploitation, radical following of Christ becomes a mockery. The author of this article tries to spell out the social and evangelical commitment of the religious and hints at practical points and conclusions. Unless all religious institutes awake themselves to this call of the hour and renew themselves and be ready to abandon their comfort zones and security within the cloister by plunging into the life of the people, especially that of the poor and the marginalized, they will be uprooted like "the fig tree that bears no fruit". The author Sunny Thottapally ofm Cap studies theology at the Capuchin Theologate, Thellakom, Kottayam.

### Introduction

Jesus might never have thought that his life, goals and his death on the cross would lead to a mode of worship among his followers dominated by rituals and the peripheral. The situation of the world today is tragic, the hunger and poverty that haunts two thirds of the humanity, the threat of mass annihilation resulting from the advance of science and technology, the experience of the triumph of injustice and oppression going unchecked, a world in which the poor die of hunger, children are killed, the innocents are tortured. We have around us many who are

condemned to spend the night in the streets. Women are forced to sell their bodies to satisfy their hunger, to sustain the life of their children. There are many who are unable to safeguard their life just because they are not in a financial position to go to a speciality hospital. Concentration of wealth in the hands of a few leads to violence and rebellious acts of naxalism, where again the poor are massacred. In the midst of all such misery and wretchedness, it is deplorable to see a bunch of religious remaining quite contented in rigorous observance of rituals and celebration of feasts. What title other than hypocrisy can be ascribed to this fiasco? How can we go on leading a life of devotion sandwiched between luxury and indifference, in a country where more than 40 % of the population live in abject poverty?

What is the relevance of the religious life today, where the majority of the world population lives in extreme struggles? Is there a future for religious Institutes? The question is relatively a recent one. It was impossible in the past even to think of such a thing, but the present mode of religious life compels us to ask this question, because, it is becoming like a parasite on society. Religious life has meaning to the extent that it is a service to humanity, and it has a future to the extent that it can continue to provide this service in an effective way. The religious institute which sees itself as incapable of such service would be, from that moment on, the “fig tree that bears no fruit,” with no right to a place in the vineyard, it is destined for uprooting.

### **The Religious and History of Commitment**

It is important to note the manner and circumstances in which religious Institutes gradually came into being. From such an observation we can learn some important lessons in considering the future. Even the very apparent diversity in the origin of the Institutes is significant. Every religious movement was influenced by the historical context in which it took shape. They laid emphasis on self-kenosis which was intended to bring about the sanctification of the society. However, in the course of time, we can see these movements diverging from the original goals and following the general social trends. Whenever such an occasion arises, the Holy Spirit intervenes to cause a renewal in the Religious life, so

that it remains faithful to its call i.e. to strive for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila and Mother Teresa are a few examples.

Religious perfection consists in this; one is bound to tread the Gospel path to the same extent as the society strays away from its values. In fact it was this vision that led Antony, the father of all monks, to the desert, that made Simon Stylites to place himself on a pillar, that transformed Francis of Assisi into a lesser brother. They understood that it is by losing everything one comes to possess the true perfection and becomes a beacon for the countless millions groping about in the dark.

"Monasteries were the main centres of help given to the poor. Aid institutionalised, adopting matriculations and building hospices".<sup>1</sup> "The hermits changed the social image of the poor; they began to be seen from the stand point of the poor themselves."<sup>2</sup> Above all mendicants begin with St. Francis of Assisi, took a new look at the ever ambiguous phenomenon of poverty. They accomplished it through their radical choice of "*like*" and "*with*" the poor. The contribution made by the hermits and mendicants to changing the image of the poor within the church must be given its due. By going to live *with* and *like* the poor and no longer just *for* them, they helped foster a better appreciation of the state in which the poor lived and the need to rescue them from it. "Another great step in the affirmation of the poor was taken by messianic and apocalyptic leaders, who, not content with living *with* and *like* the poor put themselves at their head in a process of struggle, thereby moving from a mysticism of poverty to a politics of poverty"<sup>3</sup>.

Today the time is ripe for yet another renewal, the religious having not the courage to leave the security and comfort which the four walls of their houses provide. Congregations and Orders are already institutionalised in keeping with the rapidly spreading culture of globalism. What is the contribution of the religious to the creation of a just social order? What is the witness value of their life of poverty in a

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1 Pixely Jorge and Boff Clodovis, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor* (Gillingham: Burns and Oates, 1987) p.164.

2 Ibid., p. 166.                      3 Ibid., p. 181.

consumer society of luxury, which worships the mammon of iniquity? Is their life a prophetic denunciation and announcement? Let me bring a few thoughts of the current state of religious life and its need for a paradigm shift.

### **‘The Poor’ -meaning**

‘The poor’ is a theme running through the entire Bible. In the Bible we find two connotations for the ‘poor’. The first meaning is those who are materially poor, the second meaning evolves from the first, as destitute. Bishop Vincent Concessao defines poverty: “Poverty is the denial of human rights. It is not created by the poor. It does not happen by chance. It is created and sustained by the ‘system’ we have built around us”<sup>4</sup>. Hence among the poor can be included not only those who are economically deprived, who are unable to meet even their basic needs, but also all those who are exploited, oppressed, marginalized and excluded. ‘The Message of the Catholic Bishops of India on the Role of the Church in India Today’ elaborates further the concept of poverty in the following words: “Poverty means hunger, disease, illiteracy, lack of shelter and privacy. It implies exclusion, discrimination, powerlessness, a feeling of inferiority and a sense of hopelessness. It is a struggle for survival, being enslaved to seeking a crumb. It is criminal because it does not allow a people to be people. It is a scar on our face; it is a denial of human rights and the gravest insult to human dignity”.<sup>5</sup>

It is quite true that there is a sense in which everybody is ‘poor before God’. But this idea can be invoked as a way of evading the central thrust of the biblical teaching about poverty. Some religious people today hold that the Bible is more concerned about poverty of spirit than about material poverty. However, a study of the theme of poverty in the Bible suggests that it is not helpful to make too sharp a distinction between ‘the poor’ and those who are ‘poor in spirit’. But in general it is more likely that those who are economically and politically poor will also be

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4 Rebeiro Manuel, *Church and the Multidimensional Struggles Today: Indian Perspective*; Jyotir Dhara, Oct 2004, p.86.

5 Ibid., p. 86

'poor in spirit'. The meaning of the word 'poor' can be extended and redefined to a point where the challenge of the rigid position gets lost. "Changes began to take from 1961 onward; Catholic social teaching had come to represent in practice almost the exact opposite of what is now meant by an 'option for the poor'"<sup>6</sup>. Now it is no longer merely a question of this spiritual conception of poverty but of real poverty in a far more definite and practical fashion, involving in the real poor and their life situation.

### God's Preference for the Poor

In this situation we see throughout the Bible, God does not ignore or forget them. Instead he comes to their help and takes charge of them. In the face of oppression and exploitation He takes the side of the poor and expenses their cause. In the New Testament the same fidelity of God is continued by Jesus. "The salvation and liberation announced by Jesus is comprehensive: personal and communitarian, socio-political and spiritual-religious, historical and eschatological, earthly and heavenly"<sup>7</sup>. By "Being with Jesus" we should adopt, like Him, the radicalism of His dedication and solidarity with fellow-men. "Commitment to social justice is the anticipated participation in the wholeness of God's reign proclaimed by Jesus"<sup>8</sup>. Hence faith in Jesus implies the commitment to follow Him. It is, believing in Jesus and in His way, believing in His identity as the one who came to restore human dignity in all He did.

Jesus never concerned about the Essenes, the Qumran religious community, which took recourse to ascetical practices to keep the Torah. They devoted themselves to the study of sacred writings, moved by the Mosaic Laws and community rules and became fruitless. Unlike the Essenes who engaged in ascetical practices, Jesus struggled to uplift the

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6 Dorr Donal, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred years of Vatican Social teaching* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983) p.255.

7 Amalorpavadass D.S., *Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1984) p.45.

8 (Mangai Paulose, "Religion in Dialogue with the Secular Realm", *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, Jan-Mar 2005, No. 1) p.81.

human person from the taboos, untouchability, etc. If it is so, what is the fate of the modern Essenes?

### God Experience

A constant concern that runs through is whether as religious we have failed in our commitment to the poor and thereby in our commitment to God in the poor. 'To know God' is to establish just relationships among human beings. To know God is to acknowledge the rights of the poor. When this demand is not met, God is unknown and absent, and worship of God is impossible. God is the first to opt for the poor, and it is only as a consequence of this that the religious too have to opt for the poor: "Listen, my dear brothers, it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom" (James 2:5). As the Lord himself made it so explicit in the gospel narration of the last judgment, it is in serving the poor and suffering that we truly serve Him and that He will be our judge in them on the last day (Mt.25:40). Anything less than a total commitment to the cause of the poor in our own day would amount to nothing short a betrayal of Christ.

### Commitment as Essence

Before being a duty, however, commitment to the poor is a reality of faith, or a theological truth. It has a dogmatic basis, as our examination of the Biblical aspects shows. The gospel radicalism is radiated in and through the radical openness of Christians towards one another, and particularly towards the poor. This openness, this extending of the hands is rooted in the philosophy of the kenosis on the cross, because cross is the culmination of all the suffering (Phil 2.5). It consists in the spirit of availability. It is a spirit of sharing which is done not in a paternalistic attitude but in a deep spirit of solidarity with the condition of the needy, so as to enable them to stand on their own feet with a sense of equality and human dignity. Here God is the Father of all and all the '*Others*' are brothers and sisters. For, they are not just objects of aid but are partners in the enterprise of liberation and personal realization which is mutual. The commitment to the poor is normally seen as having a prescriptive

character: it is a commandment, a fundamental option, a mission. So it gives the impression of having to be situated, in the first place, in the sphere of ethics and pastoral practice.

## Worship

In the Eucharist we celebrate the generous, dedicated and committed life of Jesus for the cause of the poor and outcasts. "For, in the Eucharist we re-present and re-live the resistance to evil and the struggle for justice which led to the historical Jesus' giving himself totally"<sup>9</sup>. On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took a loaf of bread and said, "This is my body.... Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). He had told the disciples earlier, "Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40). The dual dimension of the divine worship is quite evident here. The very same Jesus, who is present in the Eucharist, suffers even today as the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, a prisoner, a stranger. The same people, who worship Jesus at the altar, persecute him in the streets and hand him over to inhuman death.

"It is only in fighting against the evil by resisting it and by participating in the struggle for justice in the pattern of Jesus, that the intrinsic efficacy and the meaning of the Eucharist become real"<sup>10</sup>. Hence, our Eucharistic celebration will be meaningful and justifiable only when we bring about a just society where all treat the others as equals. We worship Jesus, the integral liberator in the Eucharist. To worship him means to bring about in history a more just society that adumbrates the Kingdom of God. Thus, the life of Jesus, celebrated in the Eucharist enlightens us to respond radically to resist the evil of injustice.

## Vow of Poverty as Spirit of Availability

Poverty is a constitutive element or essence of religious life. Religious life is one form of living radically the Christian discipleship.

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9 Alangaram A., *Religious for Societal Transformation: Interreligious Dialogue from Subaltern Perspectives* ( Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005) p.96.

10 Therukattil, *Vidyajyoti*, IV. p.342.

As both an exigency and consequence of religious life, poverty is an all-round freedom and total availability, for the service of all. In this service the Religious are truly 'the poor'. This spirit of availability makes one easily approachable, for one has time and space for others because one is keenly interested in the well being and well doing of the less fortunate who are precious. It is this self-kenosis that opens up new relationships with the "out-castes" or "untouchables" just as the *poverello* of Assisi exchanging his clothes and sitting in St. Peter's Square in Rome with the poor waiting for alms. This is really getting into the skin of the rejected, identifying oneself with them, whereby "what was bitter became a source of spiritual consolation."

### **Prophetic Call to take up the Cross and Die for a Cause**

Religious life finds its relevance in the prophetic mission against injustice. Christian religious life is a rebellion against the moral decadence of the society, in the light of the Scripture. The Religious who sincerely followed the foot steps of Jesus have always manifested an alternate life style, inspired by the Holy Spirit and rooted in Christ. Prophetic mission is present consecrated in the religious life from the beginning of its history. From the inception of each religious congregation and religious movement, a particular prophetic mission was involved. Prophetic mission is present consecrated in the life from the beginning of its history from the inception of each religious congregation and religious movement, a particular prophetic mission was involved. It is a sharing of Christ's life today. The life of Jesus was a growing identification with the poor and the outcast and this association brought Him persecution, cross and violent death. Jesus calls His followers to follow this life style to die for the sake of the Kingdom of the God. The prophetic spirit of Jesus must permeate the life of every religious. His vision of liberating all persons from oppressive values and structures, must be foundational to contemporary religious spirituality. Involvement with human rights based on the dignity of the human person must be a major concern of the religious as it was central to Jesus' ministry. Even if one has to endure difficulties, pain and misunderstanding, one must be fully committed to the entrusted mission.

The reign of injustice forcing many to marginalization, dehumanization and dispossession must be a serious concern for the religious. Religious must identify themselves with Jesus' prophetic life and his concern for the outcasts and those on the periphery of society, his acceptance of the equality of women, and his disapproval of all sorts of social privileges and economic stratification of society.

There is in particular a danger that consciences may be troubled, up-set, and even wounded. And those who raise the question in the first place run the risk of being accused as leftists. In particular there is the ever-present danger of discussing harsh realities when it might in all humility be better to remain silent since mere words must seem vain, and only a life of love and labour can find a real approach to that world of anguish, hunger and misery.

### **Better Means of Evangelization**

One cannot evangelize a person with a dull mind and empty stomach. So before evangelization, it is necessary to fill his stomach with food. Therefore, social work will serve the purpose of salvation and sanctification, through evangelization. The priority of evangelization and of social concern should go hand in hand. The relation between them is similar to the relation between the word and deed in revelation. There is a mutual priority and mutual causality (Cf. DV 2). That is, evangelization is the means by which God brings people to new birth, and their new life manifests itself in the service of others. Paul wrote to Galatians, "Faith works through love" (5:6); James said, "I will show my faith by my works" (2:18). Social responsibility is more than just a consequence of evangelization. It can be a bridge to evangelization. It can break down prejudices and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain hearing for the gospel. Jesus himself performed works of mercy before proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. By seeking to serve people, it is possible to move from their "felt needs" to their deeper need for God

### **Institutions**

To evaluate our various institutions, administrative structures and projects, we should use the criteria of humanization, justice and integral

human development. We should ask ourselves: to which group we belong and which system we support? There are several projects among religious which are not mainly meant for the poor. Look at colleges and high pay hospitals which are run by the religious. Here religious are caught up in the institutions; the liberators are enslaved by themselves. Some may argue that we should serve both the rich and the poor alike as both have a right to be served. This is fully true with regard to spiritual matters. The Church has to preach and administer the sacraments equally to the poor and the rich. But this is not true with regard to other areas, especially in the areas of social and medical fields. When undertaking new projects or founding new institutions, we should gear them towards the community education of masses, to create social awareness or to raise their level of awareness in view of social change. All our existing educational institutions and communications media should be reorganised to create this awareness, to lead people to involvement and to give them training for it.

### **Special Charism and the Poor**

What is the special service which religious life should provide 'today'? The accent is on today, because today is the first step to the future. The world changes; and changing with it is the concrete service it expects from us. The service which each religious institute can render is different because the original, the fundamental charisms are different. And such concrete service must be subject to evolution if it is to remain efficacious in the ever-changing world. It does not even imply change of their particular apostolate. Each institute has its own forms and priorities. But it does call all of us to affective and effective solidarity with the poor. We should relinquish many things that seem necessary. The Council has told us: It is necessary for religious to be poor in deed and in spirit.

The need to clearly identify the target group of our mission is very important. Many religious are content with 'serving everyone', which in reality is often taken as an excuse to be content with a certain type of ministry with which we are comfortable and it will not ask of us great sacrifices. There would also be the agenda, be it unconscious or

conscious, of helping groups of people to whom we ourselves are attached for reasons that are not always evangelical. Hence we should identify the poorest of the poor and those most in need of our help as the target groups of our mission.

### **Preferential Commitment to the Poor**

History shows that the “preferential commitment to the poor” is not new. Church has always been, or at least tried to be, concerned with the poor, at least in intention, a principle never denied as such. “Commitment to the poor” appears as a new phenomenon today, because it has taken a new form that of a strategic commitment. For long church was promoting works of charity, an alms giving spirituality of the rich man in the Lazar’s parable or of Samaritan act of mercy. It is now a matter of opting for the struggles of the poor and working in solidarity with them. “A characteristic feature of the religious life as it has developed over the past fifteen years has been the choice by religious of new forms of involvement with what we may call the “working world”<sup>11</sup>. Such a choice has frequently resulted in joining movements for the promotion of social justice, and consequent engagement at times, and in varying degrees, in political activity.

It is no longer a matter of bending over them full of mercy, like the Samaritan but goes beyond charity and enters into socio-political involvement. It is now a political question: that of walking along the way of the marginalised. Therefore, it is no longer a question of devising and establishing a whole new network of charitable institutions, one that would finally be adequate in the contemporary situation, continuing the church’s long practice in the centuries. Though Jesus preached a religious message, it had material, economic and social implications and political consequences. Therefore it called for a radical change of the existing order in all areas of life. The same repercussions and implications should be evident in our preaching of the Gospel today. We shall not make the Gospel ‘abstract’, ‘insipid’ and ‘irrelevant’. “It is

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11 Pixely Jorge and Boff Clodovis, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor* (Gillingham: Burns and Oates, 1987) p.183.

rather a question of challenging the system from the standpoint of the popular struggle, of dissociating oneself from works on the social institutional level and moving to works on the popular organizational level"<sup>12</sup>. This dedication is the formal novelty of the "commitment to the poor" today.

### **Empowering Rather than Charity**

The social dimension of holiness was considered charity throughout the history of the church. It has to be clarified now whether helping the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked etc., are to be understood as charity. If the social dimension of evangelization is part of the mission, if helping the poor by acts of mercy is constitutive of Christian charity, then they cannot be said to be comprehensive. Because, charity leads to slavery, a new form of beggary, where there is no empowering in feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked, in visiting the sick etc. But in such activities there could be a moral force in the sense of attraction. They are allurements in the sense spoken above, and accepted as legitimate mode of interacting with people. Religious still hold that top priority is to be given to such works. These motivated services are unfair to our Christian perception and commitment to truth and violation of justice and fairness. This is not the ideal of the kingdom where there are no masters and slaves, but God and His people. We should help the weak to stand up on their own legs. Enough of giving fish, now help them to catch it by their own fishing rode, through conscientization through education programs.

### **Paradigm Shift**

'Commitment to the poor' involves a response to the structural injustice that characterises our world. "The word 'commitment' suggests a personal choice. Personal aspect means, it is to be insisted that the choice is not essentially an act of private asceticism or even of face-to-face compassion for a poor person. It is specifically a response at the level of the wider society as a whole, a response to the unjust ordering

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

of society”<sup>13</sup>. Therefore it makes sense only in the context of an awareness of how society is in fact structured.

It is the choice of dis-entangling from serving the interests of those at the ‘top’ of society to beginning instead to come into solidarity with those at or near the bottom. “Such solidarity means commitment to working and living within structures and agencies that promote the interests of the less favoured sectors of society”<sup>14</sup>. These would include those who are economically poor, the groups that are politically marginalised or oppressed, people discriminated against on sexual grounds, people that have been culturally silenced or oppressed, and those who have been religiously disinherited or deprived.

However, the above description focuses attention on what has to be done. But what needs to be done cannot in fact be done successfully unless there is a prior, and continu-ing, attempt to find solidarity with ‘the poor’ in a more experiential way — by sharing their lives, sorrows, joys, hopes, and fears. Without this, the attempt to serve the interests of these people will be patronising — and it will make them feel more powerless and dependent than ever.

### Concrete Measures

It is important for us to distinguish what is specific to the religious ministry, especially in the modern world, which is dominated by poverty as the result of globalization, liberalization and privatization. Here the individual faces so many challenges posed by injustice and discrimination based on wealth (food and shelter), health, education, colour, region, lan-guage, caste, sex etc. Hence the ministry becomes far more challenging and difficult. Jesus’ person and his teaching were a threat to the beneficiaries and controllers of the then prevailing order. So he gave a high price for the cause; it cost him his life! Today the same we may have to pay for justice and solidarity with the poor. The ultimate sign of our credibility is our readiness to take risks and the

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13 Dorr Donal, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred years of Vatican Social teaching* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), p.3.

14 Ibid., p 4.

degree of insecurity that we have already experienced. Above all, this identification with the poor and this new type of participation in nation building will call for a total identification with Christ and his cross. This will make demands on our generosity, cause us suffering and lead us to face failures and to risk our lives. And yet the religious have to take a stand following the 'gospel maxims' even if it means alienation, unpopularity, religious starvation, downright persecution and even violent death. If the religious recoils from the prophetic role, who will be found to denounce immorality and injustice? This is part and parcel of the process of liberation as well as its authentic sign and pledge. The risk involved is nothing less than calumny and persecution. We will become victims of oppression and injustice. We will be isolated and exiled, ostracized and marginalized in society. And finally we could be killed. But he who loses his life will find it: a new existence, a true identity.

We cannot wait for change to come from the top or from the authority but we have to take the initiative to change the system. For those who run the system will normally be in favour of the present system as it is for their benefit and as they have vested interests in the status quo. Hence it is imperative to see that the change comes from the bottom while benefiting by whatever comes from the top. Instead of taking decisions and giving directives from above, local initiatives are encouraged and self-reliance promoted. In particular we should be involved in the various organisations and movements which are for defence of human rights. We need to learn the process, techniques, skills and spirituality of conscientization. "To engage oneself in the process of educating the oppressed, making them aware of their situation, and the power within them to liberate themselves, to organize the masses in view of realizing their own liberation and thereby to enable the poor, themselves "to preach the Gospel to the poor"<sup>15</sup>. Sometimes conscientization alone will not be enough. An alternative power-structure

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15 Amalorpavadass D.S., *Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1984) p.40.

would seem necessary so that those committed to action may be able to defend themselves in the process. By the prophetic role, by the solidarity with the poor, by the simple life-style and by mass education we can change much at the grass-roots level or at the level at which they live and work.

## **Conclusion**

What we need today is not argumentation, but radical action. If in the face of this challenge of poverty we do not give an answer that is radically evangelical, then religious life loses its reason for survival. The world needs the kind of obvious and unarguable witness that shakes it forcefully, forcing it to open its eyes to the reality of its problem and of the only solution. We will not achieve this with declarations and seminars, nor with more of the ambiguous statements with which the world is sated. We need words of witness so clear and striking that it will be impossible to ignore them, words that will leave perfectly obvious our single-minded message, through a life which is only possible with the power of Christ, our only saviour and the only Son of God. Such enthusiasm on the part of His followers surely pleases our divine Leader; but, in order that we may not be deceived as to what this following involves, He tells us plainly: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." This double challenge of self-denial and cross-bearing is worthy of serious consideration.

## **Capuchin Theologate**

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## Bishops and Superiors of Religious Institutes: Mutual Relationship

Varghese Koluthara

It is thirty two years since the promulgation of *Mutuae Relationes* where the Roman Document stipulated the mutual relations between bishops and religious superiors. Still the phenomena of mutual mistrust and disagreement among bishops and religious superiors prevail, especially in India. The author, Varghese Koluthara, a well-known canonist, presents in this article the ecclesial reality of religious institutes, relation of religious with the local Church, mutual relationship of hierarchy and religious and the rightful autonomy of religious institutes and their mission. He calls for further revision of CCEO in the context of the mission of religious in India today. Varghese Koluthara cmi is professor of Canon Law at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore.

The Sacred Congregation for Bishops and the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes held a mixed Plenary Assembly (Oct. 16-18, 1975) on the tenth anniversary of the promulgation of the decrees *Christus Dominus* and *Perfectae Caritatis*. The National Conferences of Bishops and of Religious, as also the International Unions of the Superiors General, men and women, were consulted. The following questions, principally, were dealt with by the Plenary Assembly:

- a. What bishops expect from religious?
- b. What religious expect from bishops?

- c. What means are to be used to arrive at orderly and fruitful cooperation between bishops and religious, both on diocesan and on national and international levels?<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, the Plenary Assembly decided to issue the document called *Mutuae Relationes*. Thus, on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1978 the Congregation for the Bishops and the Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life together gave the directives for clarifying, co-ordinating and ultimately uniting the purposes and programmes of bishops and religious major superiors of the universal church.<sup>2</sup> Even thirty two years after the promulgation of *Mutuae Relationes* the mutual relations between bishops and religious superiors have not improved according to the directives given in the document, especially in the context of India. The phenomena of mutual mistrust and disagreement are not peculiar to India alone but they exist throughout the world.

The Decree on the “Renewal of Religious Life” of Vatican II states emphatically that “suitable coordination and cooperation ought to be inaugurated between the religious and the Episcopal conferences with regard to the exercise of the apostolate.”<sup>3</sup> We present the theme under three aspects: religious life an ecclesial reality, relation of religious with the local Church, mutual relationship: a canonical analysis, pastoral works of religious, rightful autonomy of religious institutes and their mission and the related issues concerning religious and the local Churches in India.

## I. Religious Life an Ecclesial Reality

The past forty years have been ‘the best of times and the worst of times’ for the institutes of religious life in the Church. It was a time of profound changes and labelled as times of renewal, transformation and revitalisation. The Second Vatican Council has highlighted the ecclesial

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1 *Mutuae Relationes*, 5.

2 *Mutuae Relationes* (The Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes together with the Congregation for Bishops on May 14, 1978, brought out the directives for mutual relations between bishops and religious in the Church).

3 PC 23

meaning of the consecrated life, that is, its belongingness to the Church's mystery and mission<sup>4</sup>. Religious life is truly a tree planted near a river, the Church, and is rooted in her heart, because religious life draws 'its *raison d'être* and its richness'<sup>5</sup> from what is most intimate in the Church, that is to say, the union binding her to Christ as her spouse.<sup>6</sup> *Lumen Gentium* states in the following words on the ecclesiality of religious life: "By the charity to which they lead, the evangelical counsels join their followers to the Church and her mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these followers should be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church. This gives rise to the duty of working to implant and strengthen the kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that kingdom to every land. It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious communities."<sup>7</sup> The Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* has often emphasised the duty of the institutes to participate in the life of the Church. This consciousness of being part of the communion of the Church and of being at the service of the Church ought to characterise the vocation, formation and the entire life of all consecrated persons, in the variety of their contemplative and apostolic services, as the decree itself specifies.<sup>8</sup>

The ecclesial character of consecrated life and its implications arising from Church communion has been amply treated in *Mutuae Relationes*.<sup>9</sup> Mutual Relations among the various members of the People of God have attracted particular attention today. There are many issues to be dealt with the mutual relations between bishops and religious. One cannot but be impressed if one considers the fact – the importance of

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4 *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

5 E. Gambari, *For Me To Live is the Church*, Boston 1970, 33.

6 *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

7 *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

8 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2c; 7-11.

9 *Mutuae Relationes* is based on the following three propositions: (a) The Church, people of God, is a communion. (b) religious live in Church thanks to a charism which is a gift from the Lord to His Church, and (c) their life and their action in the Church must be inserted into the life and action of the Church; and the Church must discern charisms, recognise and approve them, in the same way as its hierarchy-the catholic Episcopate-is responsible before God for all pastoral action, organising and directing it on both the universal and the local levels.

which deserves to be studied more deeply – that there are over 7, 39,068 women religious in the world – that is one sister, for every 750 catholic women – and that there are about 1, 37, 724 men religious priests of all the priests (4,05,058) in the Church. In some areas they account for more than half of the total number of priests, for example, in Africa and in some parts of the Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

The ecclesiality of the religious life is in fact, a gift in the Church and for the Church that pertains to her life and sanctity and is helpful in her mission of salvation.<sup>11</sup> Religious, as well as others who live consecrated life, develop and manifest a genuine ecclesial sense, not only in seeing themselves to be *with* and *in* the Church, but also in feeling themselves *to be* the Church, identifying themselves with her, in full communion with her doctrine, her life, her pastors, her faithful and her mission in the world.<sup>12</sup> The ecclesial dimension of consecrated life as emphasised in the conciliar teachings is repeated in *Evangelica testificatio* (1971), *Redemptionis donum* (1984) and in several allocutions of Pope John Paul II. It is also reflected in several canons of CIC (1983) and CCEO (1990): (CIC cc. 573, 574, 575, 577, 590, 607; CCEO cc.410, 411, 412, §1 etc).

The theme of Synod of bishops held in Rome (2-29 Oct. 1994) was “the consecrated life and its mission.” Its chief outcome was the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* given in 1996. The exhortation itself sums up that the last thirty years of renewal in the consecrated life was one of difficult and trying period. It is very pertinent and important to stress the fact that belonging to a particular institute does not isolate one in the Church nor separate religious from the People of God; rather it is a new title and a new bond strengthening one’s insertion into the Church. In this way, religious will be, as Pope John Paul II calls them, “experts in communion.”<sup>13</sup>

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10 The details on the Catholic Church statistics upto 2002 are available at the Fides website: [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org).

11 *Lumen Gentium*, 43b; 44; CIC cc. 574; 575.

12 Cf., *Potissimum Institutioni*, 21-24.

13 Cf., Pope John Paul II, Ap. Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, 25th March 1996, n. 46.

The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a *spirituality of communion*, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension. The life of communion in fact “becomes a *sign* for all the world and a compelling *force* that leads people to faith in Christ ... In this way communion leads to *mission*, and itself becomes mission;” indeed, “*communion begets communion*: in essence it is a *communion that is missionary*.”<sup>14</sup>

*Vita Consecrata* emphasises that consecrated life is not something isolated and marginal, but a reality which affects the whole Church. The consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element of her mission. It is an integral part of Church’s life. It has proved not only as a help and support for the Church in the past but is also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future people of God (n.3). In founders and foundresses, the synod finds a constant and lively sense of the Church. It is the spirit of *sentire cum Ecclesia* (n.46), meaning “to feel with the Church,” that should guide the life and activities of religious.

As *Vita Consecrata* (49) repeats the pastoral initiatives of consecrated persons should be determined and carried out in cordial and open dialogue between bishops and superiors of different Institutes. It is helpful to recall that in coordinating their service to the universal Church with their service to the Particular Churches, Institutes may not invoke rightful autonomy, in order to justify choices which actually conflict with the demands of organic communion called for by a healthy ecclesial life.

## II. Relation of Religious with the Local Church

Many religious were groups of people ‘predominantly leading a life of fidelity to their rules,’ a silent and docile people praying for the Church. They had practically nothing to do with the issues related to the dynamism of the Church living and struggling in the world. They also had no role to play even in those matters regarding their life, activities and even administration. Now, that the Church wants the religious to

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14 Pope John Paul II, Ap. Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, n. 46.

become aware of their ecclesial dimensions. It is imperative that they get themselves more and more involved in the various concerns of the Church as a whole. This awareness is all the more necessary and important when the religious reflect on their role in and commitment to the local Church.

Here we try to understand local Church or particular Church in two distinct ways: it may refer to an individual diocese headed by a bishop or to a larger unit that comprises several dioceses and possesses a unity that springs from human factors such as culture, history, national inheritance, and so forth. Both uses are legitimate and important. We do not call all the local Churches *sui iuris* Churches<sup>15</sup>.

There is no Church without 'particular Churches' and *sui iuris* churches as there is no human body without members. No one can, therefore, belong to the Church without assuming the duty to uphold a particular Church or a *sui iuris* church, although this duty may well be differentiated according to the condition of each one. There is no immediate entry into the universal Church, since it is the *communio* of local/*sui iuris* Churches. The very structure of the Church demands that

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- 15 The term '*ecclesia sui iuris*' is a coinage of CCEO. It is a church expressly or tacitly recognized by the Supreme Authority of the Church as *sui iuris* (CCEO c. 27). Thus, today catholic church could be defined as a communion of 23 *sui iuris* churches (one belonging to the Roman Latin tradition and 22 belonging to the Oriental catholic tradition) accepting the suzerainty of the Roman Pontiff. "According to Ivan Zuzek, the Latin Church is quite dissimilar to other Churches *sui iuris* because it is headed by the pope... The reason given by the author for the difference, namely, that the Latin Church has for its head the pope himself, who has all the powers in the Church, is open to discussion. According to Vatican II, the pope is visible head of the universal Church, and so is head equally of the Eastern Catholic Churches as of the Latin or Western Church. (cf. OE 3). The Latin Church as a Particular Church has for its specific head the Patriarch of the West, who is the incumbent of the See of Rome. And the primatial powers of the Roman Pontiff and his patriarchal powers are really distinct historically and theologically. For further discussion of this question, see G. Nedungatt, "Patriarchal Ministry in the Church of the Third Millennium", *Jurist* 60(2000) 3-4". cfr., George Nedungatt (ed.), *Kanonika 10: A Guide to the Eastern Code*, Rome 2002, 100-101.

there should be a duty on every single catholic faithful to uphold his own local or particular Church or *sui iuris* Church.<sup>16</sup> Every religious institute has its mission to the diocese/eparchy as well as to the universal Church. Often they render their service through the local church. It is a duty from which there is no exception and no exemption to any of the religious institutes, whether they be diocesan, patriarchal or pontifical.

The birth, the development, the existence and the work of religious communities are nothing else than particular manifestations of the life of the Church. A religious community, independently from the Church, has no life. The legal formalities of receiving the approval for a new religious community have a deep theological significance. For, once having sought and been granted official recognition and approval, the religious institute takes upon itself an added identity. Then it becomes an 'ecclesial' institute and is linked to the hierarchy in a special manner. Official recognition identifies the institute as a Church institution and it identifies its members, as church people involved in a life of public dedication and service in the name of the Catholic Church<sup>17</sup>. This mandate from the Church does not make all the religious communities the same. Each retains its own particular character and personality. Thus, we have different religious communities in the Church according to the varying charisms of the institutes. Each institute is called to serve the universal, *sui iuris* and local Churches in different ways.

Charism of religious institutes is fundamental and precious for the members of the institutes, but it is also important for the local Church. There has to be on the part of the bishop an appreciation and recognition of charism.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between bishops and institutes of religious life, particularly an institute of pontifical right, needs a preamble, i.e., "Interest and Communication". The bishop has to have an interest in the religious and the consecrated persons in his diocese. Conversely, the

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16 cfr., L.Orsy, SJ, "A Theology of the Local Church and Religious Life", 270.

17 D.F. O'Connor, S.T., *Witness and Service*, New York\Mahwah 1990, 5.

18 J.A Galante, *Relationship of the Diocesan Bishop and the institutes of Pontifical Right in CLSA Proceedings* 56(1994), 90.

members of consecrated life within the eparchy/diocese must have an interest in the eparchy/diocese. This is because particularly for apostolic religious, their apostolate is carried out in local churches. Secondly, there has to be communication between the bishop and the major superiors of religious.

### III. Mutual Relationship: A Canonical Analysis

By analysing certain significant canons of CCEO and CIC, I try to draw up the mutual relationship that should exist in the church with eparchial bishops and religious superiors.

- (1) CCEO c.418 § 2:<sup>19</sup> *The Patriarchal and the local Hierarchy do not come under the Designation of Superior of Monks and Other Religious.*

The counsel of living under obedience means that religious obey their internal superior (*religious obedience*). In addition, as in the case with all other members of the Church, as individual members and their institutes they owe obedience also to the hierarchy of the Church (*canonical obedience*), which is defined and limited by the canons as to external or hierarchical superiors, all religious have to obey the Roman Pontiff, as their supreme superior, in virtue of the vow of obedience. Then, the patriarch (major archbishop) has authority over all institutes of patriarchal (major archiepiscopal) right, and they have to obey him as their external superior. Lastly, the eparchial bishop or exarch has power over all eparchial institutes, such as monasteries and congregations and they have to obey him as their external superior but not as their internal superior.<sup>20</sup> It is an expression powerful enough to underline the necessary rightful autonomy the religious institutes have in their proper internal discipline<sup>21</sup>.

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19 The source of the canon is *MP PAL* c.312, §5 n.10.

20 cf., V.J POSPISHIL, *Eastern Catholic Church Law*, New York 1993, 239-240.

21 cf., *Nuntia* 16, 18.

(2) CCEO c.412:<sup>22</sup> *The Obedience to the Roman Pontiff and the Exemption*

Canon 412 treats of the submission of all religious to the Roman Pontiff and of exemption. It means that not only each and every member but at the same time every religious institute is subject in a peculiar way to the Roman Pontiff<sup>23</sup>. The CCEO's understanding of exemption is based on *Lumen Gentium* 45, does not specify any institute to be exempt by law - in virtue of c.5, those who are already exempt remain so, of course, but establishes the possibility of the Roman Pontiff granting this exemption to religious institutes when it is required for the common good. *Christus Dominus* 35, 3-4 (which was later developed by *ES* II, 23-24) defined the nature of this exemption, by which religious are subject to the authority of local eparchial bishop. According to these texts, exemption refers primarily to the internal order of the institutes, while broad areas of public activity are always subject to the governance of the local eparchial bishop. To this effect, it would be correct to say that the concept and the content of exemption have undergone a considerable change compared to the former Eastern Canon Law on religious (*MP PAL*). Formerly it was the centrepiece of canon law on religious. In current legislation exemption is mainly restricted to the area of internal governance.

(3) CCEO c.413:<sup>24</sup> *Religious Institutes are subject with respect to internal rule and discipline.*

The canon distinguishes between pontifical, patriarchal and eparchial institutes. Regarding the internal governance and discipline all religious institutes are made equal. Therefore, it grants rightful autonomy to all religious institutes whether they are of pontifical,

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22 The source of the canon is the following: *MP PAL* CCEO cc.23-24; *Lumen Gentium.*, 45; *Christus Dominus.*, 35 n. 3; *MP PAL.*, 312, §2 n.4 etc.

23 *Nuntia* 16, 11.

24 The Source of the canon are the following: *MP PAL* CCEO cc.312, §2 nn.1-3; 313, §2 n.2; *Lumen Gentium.*, 45; *Christus Dominus.*, 35, 3-4, etc.

patriarchal or eparchial rights. In this sense the canon is an innovation compared to the *MP Postquam Apostolicis Litteris*.

In the case of institutes of pontifical right, the immediate and exclusive external authority devolves upon the Apostolic See, which it exercises through its different dicasteries and, in particular, through the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.<sup>25</sup> This competence of the Apostolic See also pays attention to their rightful autonomy in the internal governance and discipline proper to the institute in dealing with them.

There are patriarchal right religious institutes such as *Stauropegial* monastery, order and congregations. The patriarch can for a grave reason, having consulted the eparchial bishop and with the consent of the permanent synod, concede the status of a *Stauropegial* monastery in the very act of foundation of a monastery *sui iuris*. The *Stauropegial* monastery is directly subject to the patriarch in such a way that he alone enjoys the rights and obligations of an eparchial bishop toward the monastery, the members assigned to it, as well as the persons who day and night dwell in the monastery.

Religious institutes of eparchial right are those, which are erected by the eparchial bishop, and if they have not obtained a decree of recognition from the Apostolic See or from the patriarch<sup>26</sup>. The eparchial bishop has special competence regarding institutes of eparchial right, not only as public juridical persons situated in the eparchy, but also in their capacity as institutes of consecrated life. This power is external, however, and must not be confused with the internal power of superiors of the institutes or with the internal power of governance.

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25 M. Brogi, "La Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali in La Curia Romana nella Cost. Apostolica "*Pastor Bonus*", *Studi Giuridici* 21(1990) 254; 267. M. Brogi in this article clarifies the competence and the function of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in the context of the new rules of the Roman Curia through the Apostolic Constitution the *Pastor Bonus*.

26 CCEO cc. 434; 505,§2,3.

Moreover, the concluding provision of the same canon, namely the reference to c. 418, §2 as controlling the interpretations of its own provisions regarding subjection to the Patriarch and to the eparchial bishop on the part of these institutes is limitative<sup>27</sup>. They are never the internal superiors of these institutes. Their authority on these institutes is external, a supervisory power, rather than of ordinary administration.

#### IV. Pastoral Works of Religious

Regarding apostolates of religious, the thrust of *Christus Dominus* puts the main responsibility for the pastoral works of the diocese upon the shoulders of the diocesan bishop. Thus, there is no church or oratory in his diocese where the faithful have habitual access, there is no school other than those open only to the institute's own members, and there are no works of religion and charity entrusted to religious, whether these works be spiritual or temporal, that the eparchial bishop does not have a right to visit, either personally or through a delegate (CCEO cc. 683, §1).

CCEO c.413 is not a mere doctrinal principle explaining the Petrine authority, but it has practical implications. The canon underlines that the other sectors especially of the pastoral rights of the bishops are safeguarded here. The canon encompasses all religious institutes of clerical and non-clerical states, of women and men. Differing from the *MP PAL* the CCEO places the institutes of pontifical right of non-clerical state, of women and men on the same level regarding requirements from the bishop, on the pastoral level. It is valid also for clerical religious institutes of pontifical right, whether they are exempt or not. They all remain under the eparchial bishop's jurisdiction in many areas such as 'public celebration of divine worship, to the preaching of the word of God to the people, to the religious and moral education of the Christian faithful, especially of children, to catechetical and liturgical instruction

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27 D.M.A. Jaeger, "Observations on Religious in the Oriental Code", in J Chiramel & K.Bharanikulangara (eds.), *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches; A Study and Interpretation*, Alwaye 1992, 167.

and to what becomes the clerical state, as well as to various works of the apostolate' (CCEO c. 415, §1). It is the right and duty of the eparchial bishop to make a visitation of each monastery and of houses of orders as often as he conducts a canonical visitation there or whenever he judges that grave reasons suggest (CCEO c. 415, §2).

It is solely the right of the eparchial bishop to name pastors from a religious institute; but the major superior is to propose a suitable priest of his institute to the eparchial bishop for the appointment with due regard for agreements entered into with the eparchial bishop (CCEO c.284, § 2). But he can be removed either at the discretion of the eparchial bishop after having notified the major superior or by the major superior who also has to notify the eparchial bishop without the need of each other's consent (CCEO c.1391, §2).

It is the eparchial bishop alone, but not the administrator of an eparchy, after consulting the presbyteral council, and with the consent of the major superior of a religious institute, who can erect a parish in the church of the same institute with the permission of the patriarch within the territorial boundaries over which he presides, or in other cases, of the Apostolic See (CCEO cc.282, §1; 480). This erection must be done by means of a written agreement made between the eparchial bishop and the major superior of the religious institute. This agreement is to state precisely what parochial ministry is to be fulfilled, the persons to be attached to the parish, the financial arrangements, and the rights and obligations of the members of the same institute in that church and those of the pastor (CCEO c.282, §2).

Where the eparchial bishop has found abuses in their churches, or in the houses of religious institutes of patriarchal or pontifical right, and the superior, warned by the same hierarch, has failed to take care of it, the same local hierarch is obliged to refer the matter without delay to the attention of the authority to which the institute is immediately subject (CCEO c.417). A religious, who committed a delict outside their house and has not been punished by his proper superior, and the hierarch has

warned the proper superior in vain, can be punished by that hierarch even if he has lawfully left and has returned to the house (CCEO c. 416, §1).

The eparchial bishop can even make some demands upon religious, as part of his responsibility of services for the needs of the faithful according to each one's condition and ability (CCEO c.203, §2). However, cooperation by all concerned is required<sup>28</sup>. It is under the eparchial bishop's direction that various forms of apostolate in the eparchy are fostered and he has to see to it that all the works of the apostolate in the eparchy or in particular districts are co-ordinated (CCEO c.203, §1).

#### **V. Rightful Autonomy of Religious Institutes and their mission in the Church in the context of India**

The Church establishes a religious community through the act of public approval. This initial act should be followed by unceasing help and encouragement to promote the integration of religious into the life of the Church, both universal and particular. Respect for the way of life of each group should be the fundamental rule that governs the attitude of the Apostolic See, Patriarch or of the diocesan bishop. There is no single rule to say how this respect should go<sup>29</sup>. When the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church accepts and applies the whole section on the consecrated life with the principle of rightful autonomy of religious institutes, the Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches cautiously and sparingly uses the term *autonomy* (CCEO c.640, §2). The omission of the use the term 'autonomia' in CCEO perhaps hints at a diffidence towards the term' of the PCCICOR. Sometimes it can be said that 'an abstract principle of autonomy can hardly be applied rarely in juridical interpretations, but the concrete norm helps to determine the autonomy of religious institutes'.<sup>30</sup> However, in CCEO, the canons dealing with

28 *Christus Dominus.*, 35, n,5; *Ad Gentes.*, 30, n.2.

29 L.Orsy, SJ, "A Theology of the Local Church and Religious Life",274.

30 G.Nedungatt, *The Spirit of the Eastern Code*, Rome & Bangalore 1993, 246-247.

religious institutes and their dependence on the hierarchy are clearly earmarked by the phrase 'respecting the internal rule and religious discipline'<sup>31</sup>.

Speaking of the (*iusta autonomia vitae*) *rightful autonomy* (c. 586. §1) the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church resumes the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council on the identity of the institutes and the diversity of the consecrated life. The expression (*iusta autonomia vitae*) *rightful autonomy* situates better the position of the institutes of consecrated life in ecclesial life and in the rapport of the communion proper to the life of the Church. Thereby they can enjoy in the Church a proper discipline and a proper arrangement in the vision of the faith in their proper patrimony or proper identity as underlined in c. 578. Here, something is acknowledged, something that is previously and effectively founded upon and it is end-oriented. This acknowledgement does not create a total autonomy, rather, it transforms the reality of each institute of consecrated life<sup>32</sup>

The term (*agnoscitur*) acknowledge, can suggest that rightful autonomy is native<sup>33</sup>, that is gushing from the very nature of the institute and to that institute, rightful autonomy is recognised. It means that rightful autonomy of the religious institutes pre-exists and the Legislator acknowledges it and sanctions it<sup>34</sup>. It can also signify that rightful autonomy is recognised or conferred to the religious institutes through the ministry of the Church<sup>35</sup>. The *Legislator* acknowledges to each single

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31 V.Koluthara, CMI, *Rightful Autonomy Religious Institutes: A comparative Study Based on the Code of Canons of Oriental Churches and the Code of Canon Law*, Rome & Bangalore 1994, 189.

32 V.Koluthara, CMI, *Rightful Autonomy Religious Institutes*, 50.

33 Ghirlanda, "Iusta autonomia et Exemptio Institutorum Religiosorum: Fundamenta et Extensio", *Periodica* 78(1989) 113-142.

34 The use of indicative *agnoscitur* in CIC c.586, being a statement of fact, as it were in itself a recognition of an exigency inherent in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, which is the institutes of consecrated life, is significant in conveying the innate nature of their rightful autonomy. Cf., JAEGER, "Observations on Religious", 163-164.

35 Cf., E. Gambbani, *I Religiosi nel Codice*, 50.

religious institute a rightful autonomy. Others in the Church, must respect it, but they cannot acknowledge it to the religious institutes while they have no power to do so<sup>36</sup>.

The rightful autonomy is recognised in (*singulis institutis*) every religious institute whether it is of diocesan or of pontifical right. The acknowledgement of this rightful autonomy to each and every institute of consecrated life gives it a juridical existence in the ambit of universal canonical norms, thereby preventing its reduction to a merely programmatic axiom, that has no utility in law and is even contradictory in actual canonical system<sup>37</sup>. The grade and the dose of autonomy will be different but the principle of rightful autonomy is valid for all institutes. Autonomy is clearer in the pontifical and Patriarchal religious institutes than the diocesan ones. This autonomy is more in the clerical than the lay institutes of religious life. The maximum expression of such autonomy can be found in the pontifical clerical institutes of consecrated life. Moreover, the bishops are reminded of the respect due to their rightful autonomy (c. 586, §2) and the same for the Holy See for the pontifical institutes (c. 593).

The rightful autonomy is (*praesertim regiminis*) especially recognised in this sector on government of the institute. It does not mean that it is only in this sector. But this autonomy radiates the whole life style of a religious institute and especially the field of internal government. Autonomy is expressed through its whole-encompassing spirit, a style of action, a mode of prayer, well tuned formation, the members' right for the separation from a religious institute, administration of its temporal goods, its apostolate etc. In fact, this autonomy may be more clearly expressed in the internal government of an institute than its external apostolates<sup>38</sup>. The internal government of an institute is

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36 Cf., D. J. Andres, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi*, 19-20.

37 Cf., D. J. Andres, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi*, 19.

38 Although the 1917 Code warned against the interference of the local ordinary in the internal affairs of a pontifical institute, it singled out numerous areas for his vigilance over lay institute. Cf., S. L. Holland, "Institutes of consecrated Life",

expressed in its religious and disciplinary spheres, for example, the competent authority of the institute receives new members, admits to profession or incorporation, receives sacred bonds, gives apostolic assignments, supervises the administration of goods, etc.

One of the objectives of the acknowledgement of rightful autonomy to religious institutes is to preserve their patrimony, because they are treasures of the Church and she has a duty to preserve them. To this end they are acknowledged the right to have their own government, according to the ecclesiastically approved constitutions or *typicon*<sup>39</sup> or statutes. Rightful autonomy does not mean complete independence from the hierarchy of the Church. It should enhance the religious institutes to insert themselves into the life of the Church, according to each religious institute's character and patrimonial identity. All religious are subject to the local hierarchy in matters of pastoral activities as well as various works of apostolate. The hierarchy has a special responsibility to integrate fully religious institutes into the life of the Church, while they are called to be the promoters and protectors of the rightful autonomy of the religious institutes in the Church<sup>40</sup>.

If we analyse the instances of the dependence and rightful autonomy of the eparchial/diocesan, stauropegial and pontifical monasteries and other religious institutes it becomes evident that there is no fundamental difference between CCEO and CIC on the question of rightful autonomy of monasteries and other religious institutes and their dependence on the hierarchy in the Church. Whereas CIC acknowledges the rightful autonomy due to all religious institutes directly, CCEO indirectly acknowledges the rightful autonomy to all religious institutes, and places monasteries historically and aptly as the prototype

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in J. A. Coriden and Others(eds.), *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, New York 1985, 458

39 *The Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches* makes use of the Greek word 'typicon' to denote the fundamental norms of a monastery, duly approved by the competent Church authority.

40 V.Koluthara,CMI, *Rightful Autonomy Religious Institutes*, 189.

of all other forms of religious institutes. The indirect way of affirming the rightful autonomy to all religious institutes in the CCEO lacks the force and the clarity as we find in the CIC.

Therefore, the harmony between the autonomy and dependence is the yardstick of the mutual relationship between bishops and superiors of religious institute in the Church. It is a two-way responsibility. On the one hand, the ecclesiastical authorities have got great responsibility to respect and promote the patrimony of a religious institute and on the other, the religious institutes have an inviolable duty to be aware of the ecclesiality of religious life, that is, of being an integral part of the Church as people of God, and binding themselves to the needs of the eparchial/diocesan, patriarchal and universal Church, according to their specific charism and purpose. For this, mutual consultation and dialogue have to be promoted between the religious superiors and the eparchial/diocesan bishops and patriarchs. Thus mutual knowledge, understanding and appreciation will enhance the harmony in the Church.

## **VI. Some Issues concerning Religious and the Local Church in India**

The above discussion on the theology and the law of the Church regarding religious and the local Church leads us to reflect on the following practical issues:

(1) Collaboration and Dialogue should continue. Too often Bishops and major superiors simply do not understand one another's perspectives and goals. Often agreements between the eparchy and the Institute are poorly delineated or non-existent. For ensuring the healthy ministry in the eparchy/diocese it is good that the religious do the apostolate in the eparchy with clear notions of their rights and obligations articulated in a contract signed by the bishop and the concerned major superior of the religious institutes. This contract or agreement is of great importance and should never be neglected. Therefore, the major superiors have to take the initiative: (i) It must be signed by the appropriate persons representing the eparchy (diocese) and the religious community. (ii) It must deal with at least three subjects in detail: a description of the work

and how it is to be carried out, assignment procedures of the personnel, and financial arrangements. (iii) These contracts are to be renewed in appropriate intervals.

(2) Religious 'must recognize the dignity of the bishop in his diocese. They always owe him devout respect and obedience'<sup>41</sup>. The authority of the bishop and that of the religious major superior in the exercise of the apostolate must be harmoniously coordinated. CD 35.5 and MR treat at length the need of appropriate interaction of bishops and superiors of religious institutes. The apostolates of religious are an area that needs special attention. The difference existing between the *distinctive* works of an institute (*according to their charism*) and of works *entrusted* to an institute should be kept in mind by the Local Ordinary. In fact, the former depend on the religious superiors according to their constitutions, even though in pastoral practice, they are subject to the jurisdiction of the local ordinary according to law (MR 57a). The II Vatican. council (LG 45 CD 34-35, PC 6, ES I 23-26; 35-36, MR 28, 33-36) gives pre-eminent role to bishop in a diocese especially in coordinating all apostolic initiatives with a view to unity and effectiveness, and it should be respected by the major superiors of the religious institutes.

(3) Certain works are *entrusted* to religious such as a parish, school, retirement home, etc., in which the bishop employs the religious for a certain work. In those instances a certain written agreement is to be drawn up between the diocesan bishop and the competent superior of the institute. Thus, works *entrusted* to them are to be carried out based on contracts (CIC c. 681; CCEO cc. 543; 282, §2). In fact, the religious who are engaged with these specific ministries, depend on the religious superiors according to their constitutions, even though in pastoral matters

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41 Velasio De Paolis, cs, "Commentary on CIC c. 678", in Angel Marzoa, Jorge Miras and Rafael Rodriguez-Ocana(eds.), *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, vol.II/2, Montreal& Chicago, 2004, 1815.

they are subject to the jurisdiction of the local Ordinary according to law (MR 57; cf. ES 1, 29).

(4) In discerning the needs of the local Church in India, let the religious institutes which have a thrust for contemplative life make new efforts and initiatives to experiment with, new forms of religious life. Our traditional rules and regulations on habit, enclosure and even the religious discipline may have to be adapted to the demanding needs of each local Church in India. According to CCEO c.571, Patriarchs and eparchial/diocesan bishops are charged to discern, promote and regularise the new charisms of consecrated life. New forms of religious life may also give challenges for new ways of witnessing to the message of Jesus to the *sitz im leben* of various local Churches in India. These new forms of religious life should be simpler, transparent and open to the people of God.

## Conclusion

Our reflection on the mutual relationship makes us realize that there has been a serious difference between the very making of the canons on religious life in CIC and CCEO. It seems to me that it could be due to the fact that there was no comparison between the rich contributions made by the ever available eminent scholars of the religious institutes of the Latin Church and the limited contributions made by a small group of the scholars from the Oriental religious institutes. While the rightful autonomy of the religious institutes is well guaranteed in CIC, CCEO feels diffident even to use the word 'autonomy' in its discussion on religious life. It seems to me that the above mentioned juridical and practical issues are the immediate consequences of this *lacuna* of the CCEO. It is time now to re-think and re-articulate the concerned canons of institutes of consecrated life in CCEO for bettering the mutual relationships between bishops and major superiors. There are also instances where the rightful autonomy of religious institutes is neglected in the Latin dioceses in India though the Code of Canon Law of Latin Church firmly acknowledges it to the religious. It is an instance where we have legal remedy but lack of application of the legal provision by

the concerned parties. We have to welcome changes and show that 'church is ever youthful' and ever ready to adapt herself to the signs of the times and needs of the people. It is a challenge placed before the eparchial or diocesan bishops and the major superiors of various religious institutes in India for bettering their mutual relationships imbibing the spirit of the instruction given by the Holy See on mutual relationship.

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